



“The Purpose of Trials” (James 1:1-18, 2013)

Danny Hodges – NT3553

Intro: James is the oldest of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, the first one written. There are four possible James who wrote this little epistle: The first is the apostle James son of Alphaeus (Mark 3:18). Some believe that this James was the brother of Matthew, who was also the son of a man named Alphaeus (Mark 2:14). The second is James the father of Judas, Judas also being one of the Twelve, but distinct from Judas Iscariot (Luke 6:16). A third choice is James the son of Zebedee, the older brother of John, both of whom were also apostles (Mark 3:17). Jesus gave them the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder.” They wanted to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village that did not welcome Jesus (Luke 9:54). Obviously they had some anger issues! Our fourth choice is James the Lord’s brother, technically his half-brother, because as we know Mary was Jesus’ earthly mother, but he had no earthly father. But Joseph and Mary had more children after Jesus (see Mark 6:3). The majority of scholars believe that this James is the one who penned the epistle of James. Acts 12:2 tells us that James the brother of John was killed by Herod. James son of Alphaeus is quite obscure, and James the father of Judas even more so. The James who wrote this letter assumes that his audience would immediately know which James he is. He would have been very familiar to the audience he is writing to, “the twelve tribes scattered among the nations” (v.1; Acts 8:1). Jesus appeared to his brother James at some point after the resurrection (see I Cor.15:3-7). Wow! Can you imagine growing up as one of Jesus’ siblings, then after years of being a staunch critic of your own brother, you realize he’s SUPERMAN! Paul says in Gal.1:19 that on his first trip to Jerusalem after his conversion he met James the Lord’s brother, and he seems to refer to him as an apostle. Then in Gal.2:9 he refers to James as one who has a reputation as a “pillar” of the church. When God miraculously delivered Peter from prison in Acts 12, he tells those in the home of Mary to tell “James and the brothers” about his deliverance. In Acts 21:17 Paul says that when he arrived in Jerusalem, he and those with him went to see James “and all the elders were present. In the council of elders in Acts 15, it is James who voices the final word that all the other elders agree to. And last but not least, let’s not forget Gal.2:11-12. Peter was intimidated by James, which tells us what a reputation he had. It is believed that James became the “senior pastor,” if you will, of the church in Jerusalem. By the way, he was also known as James the Just because of his unwavering devotion to righteousness. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, he was martyred in A.D. 62.

Question: Why is it important which James wrote this epistle? Because if James the Lord's brother wrote it, it is a tremendous encouragement to pray for people in your family who are staunch critics of the gospel, and of Jesus Christ (see John 7:1-6). Jesus' own brothers were critics, even mocking him here. Don't forget that at one point Jesus' whole family (that would include his Mother Mary) thought he was "out of his mind" (see Mark 3:20-21). No doubt Jesus prayed for his brothers, and his whole earthly family. Never give up (Luke 18), and never underestimate whose life God is able to change. The most critical of Jesus in your family today may become a great leader in the Kingdom tomorrow. That's exactly what happened with James the Lord's brother.

Did you know we have another NT epistle penned by another of Jesus' half-brothers? (See Jude 1.)

Paul the apostle normally begins his writings with a theological argument, then gives practical exhortation. James begins with practical exhortation and continues nonstop to the end. James is a "do this, do that" kind of book.

Some have divided the book into as many as twenty-five major divisions, others twelve, some four, and some as few as two. But one thing is clear, no matter how you divide it – the dominant theme is faith that works out practically in everyday life. It is a series of tests for the genuineness of one's salvation. There's nothing in here about the crucifixion of Christ or His resurrection, nothing about the deity of Christ, nothing about justification, nothing about regeneration. These things aren't mentioned at all because they are assumed. It's very clear that he is writing to people who say they believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Some people have said, "Well, James is in conflict with Paul." Not at all. To Paul the question was this, "How is salvation received?" In the book of Romans Paul was asking and answering that question, "How is salvation received?" Paul's answer was always by faith alone. But to James the question is, "How is salvation verified?" And his answer always is, "By works alone." It is received by faith, it is verified by works. There's no conflict there, there's perfect harmony; see Matthew 3:8, 10; John 15:8; Acts 26:20; I John; II Cor.13:5.

May the Lord speak to each one of us through this straightforward and extremely practical epistle.

vv.1-4 The Global Nature of Trials; James addresses his letter to those scattered "among the nations." In every nation, the trials would be unique, but in every nation there would be trials to face. Everybody goes through trials!

- Job 14:1 Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.

Note that the specific trials God allows in my life as a believer were pre-ordained before the beginning of time. We are not talking about my suffering and trials as a result of bad decisions and foolish living, but rather God ordained struggles intended for my good and God's glory.

Trials "of many kinds." The original word means multi-colored; disappointments, frustrations, misunderstandings, unfulfilled dreams, unmet expectations, great loss, great loneliness, fear, criticism, persecution, conflict.

The Oxford Dictionary definition of trial: A trying thing, or experience, or person.

Let's take a brief survey of the trials we are facing right now in life:

- A trying "thing" (Show of hands)
- A trying "experience"
- A trying "person" (The majority of those hands are the married people in the audience! See I Cor.7:28.)

Why should we consider it "pure joy" when we face trials?

- Without trials I will never mature as a Christian. (Heb.5:8)
- Perseverance through trials proves my faith to be genuine. (I Peter 1:6-7; John 8:31; Matthew 24:13; Col.1:21-23a; Hebrews 3:14; 10:35, 39)

vv.5-8 Wisdom available to aid me in persevering through trials.

- This is not intellectual understanding, or an accumulation of knowledge, but rather an inner understanding for living life in the midst of adversity.
- Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

There is one requirement if we are to receive this kind of wisdom: the asking for it must flow out of faith in, or rather commitment to, God. In other words, the doubter is the person who is not wholly committed to God. Such a person will not get wisdom. In fact, such a person will not receive anything at all from God.

Doubting here speaks not of uncertainty but of internal indecision. It is a wavering between two competing desires. As long as a person is not fully committed to the Lord, they will not receive wisdom from the Lord. Balaam, despite God's revelation of Himself to him, and despite the Holy Spirit allowing him to prophesy truth repeatedly, never became a wise man because he "loved the wages of wickedness."

What will this wisdom do for us when we receive it?

vv.9-12 I get a proper perspective on life; When God declares *His* values, human values are negated. God views people in “lowly circumstances” as spiritually advantaged. The entire New Testament (not to mention the evidence of history) suggests that riches (and what goes with them) is a potential danger to spiritual life.

- Matthew 13: 22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.
- Mark 10: 23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"... 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."
- Rev.3: 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.
- Luke 16:15...What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.
- I Tim.6: 17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.
- Luke 12:15...a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.
- Zacchaeus; the apostles who left everything; contrast with the rich young ruler, who kept what money could buy, and forfeited what money cannot buy.

The point is perspective. The one in lowly circumstances has a spiritual advantage. But they need wisdom from God to see the advantage they have. And anyone can lose that perspective in the midst of the trials of life, or in the midst of the blessings life may bring!

- See Psalm 73.

vv.13-18 Perspective regarding temptation; God does not allow us to go through the trials in order to tempt us. He is looking to use these trials for our eternal good, and his eternal glory. If we move away from God during a trial, it is never God's fault. We move away because of our own evil desire. James does not want people to blame the devil either, but to take the responsibility squarely on their own shoulders. The same word that means an enticement to evil is also used to speak of a trial. The difference is how you respond to it. If you respond to a trial with obedience, then you find it a means of spiritual growth. If you respond to a trial with

disobedience it has turned into a temptation and you have fallen prey to it. Every trial has the potential to become a temptation, depending on our response.

See Gen.3:12-13; Robert Burns, the famous Scottish poet, wrote, "Thou knowest Thou hast formed me with passions wild and strong, and listening to their witching voice has often led me wrong," end quote. And Robert Burns has articulated what people have believed throughout the centuries that God made us with wild and strong passions, therefore what else could He expect but susceptibility to temptation. Even the Jews among the rabbis of ancient times believed this. They called man's evil impulse "yetzhar hara" and they said the "yetzhar hara" is man's evil impulse as opposed to good impulse. And the Jews' reasons, some of them, that because God had created everything and because He created man, He must also have created "yetzhar hara." If He made everything, He must have made that. So we get rabbinic sayings like this, "God said, It repents me that I created the evil tendency in man for had I not done so, he would not have rebelled against Me.

Prov.19:3 A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord.

"Dragged away" and "enticed" are two interesting words. Both of them are participles. The first one comes from hunting. And it is used of luring an animal into a trap...a trap is baited and the animal is lured into the trap. The verb itself, "helkomi" means to be drawn by an inward power, an inward power. It means to be led, to be compelled, to be impelled, to be lured into a trap, to be baited and caught. It's a hunting term. The second term, "enticed," is a fishing term. That word means literally to capture or catch and its literal use was to catch a fish with bait, to bait a hook and catch. In [2 Peter 2:14](#) and [18](#), it is translated "to allure" or "to beguile," "deleazo sominos," it means to entice, to catch a fish with bait.

Perspective regarding the pain and suffering that come with trials; When God saved us, he made us the "apple of his eye." We are the "firstfruits" of all God created. We are so important to God, and He loves us so much - that He allows us to suffer! Suffering is actually a gift from God.

- Deut.8: 3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.
- Matthew 4: 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"
- Heb.5: 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.
- Acts 5: 41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.
- Phil.1: 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him...

CONCLUSION

* What's your perspective on life right now? Facing some trials? You need the wisdom of God in those trials. But you'll never receive from Him with a half-hearted commitment. You've got to lay your life in His hands completely and then trust Him in and through the trial.

* Don't give in to temptation as a result of the trials you face. Stay committed to the Lord through the trial, because we know by faith that he is using the trial for our eternal good, and His eternal glory. The suffering you are going through is actually a gift from the Lord, and through the suffering, you'll discover and experience life that is really life – the kind of life that is not based on anything this present world has to offer us. And by persevering through the trial, we will mature in the Lord.