

James 1 Notes

Greeting (1:1)

- James' later designation of his readers as "brethren" (2:1) makes it clear that he means Christian Jews.
- It is probable that the recipients were the members of the Jerusalem church who had been driven out of Jerusalem at the time of Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19-20). However, this exile from their native land had taken place over a long period of time and in many ways.

Trials, Perseverance, Wisdom And Faith (1:2-8)

- Trials (1:2-4).
 - The command to "count" is imperative because joy is not the natural human response to trouble. "All joy" means pure, unmixed and complete joy. The sufferer is to be glad that he can suffer. He is not to dwell on the unpleasantness of the experience.
 - Because our trials are multi-faceted, the sufferer cannot be prepared for the circumstance of each; he can only be prepared in attitude for whatever specific form it may take.
- Perseverance (1:4).
 - The only way out of a trial is through it. Endurance will show itself perfectly in practice.
 - Perseverance in facing trials develops maturity of character and a balance of all the graces and strengths needed for the Christian life.
- Wisdom (1:5).
 - James is probably connecting wisdom and poverty with trials. If anyone lacks wisdom to see the value and ability in trials as just explained, he must go to a divine source for such wisdom.
 - Wisdom is the common sense to put into practice the principles and instructions given in the revelation of God's word. Wisdom is needed to develop the right attitude toward suffering.
- Prayer (1:5).
 - The source of wisdom is God, and the method of obtaining it is prayer (cf. Matthew 7:7). Prayers for wisdom are frequent in Jewish literature (1 Kings 3:5-15; 4:29-34; Proverbs 2:6).
 - God gave Solomon wisdom in answer to his prayer. No other will ever attain the stature of wisdom which he had, but God will still give wisdom to all who ask.
- Faith (1:6-8).
 - Doubting shows that the praying person has not committed himself fully to trust in God. The whole picture is one of indecision and uncertainty.

- Perhaps the thought is that the one praying is lifted high like the crest of the wave by hope one minute and then lowered by doubt and despair of receiving the next.
- This sort of instability is not only apparent when the person prays, it marks "all his ways." In one's personal life, business life, social life, as well as spiritual life, indecisiveness negates all effectiveness.

Riches, Temptation And The New Birth (1:9-18)

- Riches (1:9-11).
 - There was in the possession of riches a constant source of pride. However, one must do their duty to God in whatever circumstances the changing fortunes of life may thrust upon him.
 - Life is as fleeting for the poor man as the rich, but James' warning is directed to the rich because the tendency to trust in riches may make him more likely to forget the fact quoted from Isaiah 40:6-8.
 - Man must put his confidence in something more permanent than riches. These are sobering thoughts that tend to reduce the rich to the level of human beings in general, just as the privilege of suffering for Christ lifts the poor person to a new plane of dignity and worth.
- Trials (1:12).
 - "Blessed" describes the enviable state of the person who does not give up when confronted with hard and difficult circumstances but remains strong in faith and devotion to God.
 - Love is put forth by James as the motivating power which makes endurance in trials possible.
- Temptations (1:13-15).
 - The word "temptation" in vs. 13 is the same as "temptations" in v. 2; here, however, it obviously means temptation (see the words "evil" in vs. 13; "lust" in vs. 14; "sin" in vs. 15).
 - "Tempted" is a strong word which expresses the intensity of the lusts or passions that are within us. These lusts are God-given; they are not wrong in and of themselves. However, when we satisfy them through sin, we are condemned.
 - James changes his figure from a snare to conception and birth to describe the experience of yielding to sin. If sin is allowed to grow unchecked in us and become perfected without repentance, it will produce ruin.
- The new birth (1:16-18).
 - The concept of God's goodness rules out the possibility that he would send an influence as destructive as temptation. His gifts are marked by kindness and helpfulness, not destructiveness.
 - Unlike the "shadow of turning" that is caused by the sun, moon, and stars, God does not change.

- Rather than acting destructively, God acts constructively. God accomplishes our new birth by His own deliberate choice. The early Christians were a preliminary indication of the great host of people who through subsequent centuries would be born again.

The Tongue, The Word And Pure Religion (1:19-27)

- Watch your tongue (1:19-21).
 - We ought (in view of the word's power) to be quick to hear -- to be eager and anxious to hear the message of God.
 - The idea of "slow to speak" is "slow to speak back at, or show displeasure at the teachings of the word" (cf. Acts 13:45).
 - An angry man cannot please God; in such a state he cannot do works which are acceptable to God. Only those who are humble in spirit can enter His kingdom.
- Be doers of the word (1:21-25).
 - "Filthiness and naughtiness" are so abundant that it must be stripped off like dirty clothes in preparation for receiving the word. The reception of truth must of necessity be marked by humility or meekness. This is not to be construed as spineless weakness. Instead, it is the quality of a strong man that makes him docile and submissive rather than haughty and rebellious.
 - Truth must be infused and engrafted in our hearts and minds. Those who congratulate themselves on being hearers of the truth are deceiving themselves. If they assume that this is all that is needed to be saved, they are sadly mistaken.
 - The word is a kind of mirror in which we see our true selves and how far short we are from being and doing as we should. The idea is that many people look at themselves in mirrors and then go away forgetting what they saw; a look into the "perfect law of liberty" will reveal every fault which needs correcting (cf. John 13:17).
- Pure religion (1:26-27).
 - A man may suppose himself to be devout or pious while not heeding what he has heard about self-control of the tongue. The word "religious" carries the idea of external rite or service. One may be a worshiper of God in vain. The warning is in line with the Old Testament prophets who emphasized that the service of God in sacrifices and sabbath keeping or tithing was of no value if one disregarded the duty of justice and mercy and faith.
 - Pure means "what is free from stain or sin." Acceptable worship is that which combines religious service and a holy life with active participation in good deeds. "To visit" literally means "to look in on" or "go to see." As one can see, James uses multiple single pronouns to show that this is an individual responsibility.

- The “world” is the realm of Satan, the world of evil men who are in the kingdom of evil (1 John 2:15). One must guard themselves from this influence, for it will defile one (cf. 1 Timothy 6:14; 1 Peter 1:19; 2 Peter 3:14).