

Studies in James

James 1:1-8

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Background

Traditionally, the book of James (James 1:1) is attributed to a James who was probably the brother of Jesus and the leader of the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). There are four men in the New Testament who have this name. The author of this letter could not have been the apostle James {the son of Zebedee, Matthew 4:21}, who died by the sword (Acts 12:2) too early (A.D. 44) to have written it. The other two men named James (James son of Alphaeus, Matthew 10:3; James father of the apostle Judas [not Iscariot], Luke 6:16) had neither the stature nor the influence that the writer of this letter had.

James was one of the several brothers of Christ, and was probably the eldest since he heads the list in Matthew 13:55. At first, he did not believe in Jesus, and even challenged him and misunderstood his mission (John 7:2-5, Mark 3:21). Later he became very prominent in the church:

- i. He was one of the select individuals Christ appeared to after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7);
- ii. Paul called him a 'pillar' of the church (Galatians 2:9);
- iii. Paul, on his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, saw James (Galatians 1:19);
- iv. Paul did the same on his last visit (Acts 21:18);
- v. When Peter was rescued from prison, he told his friends to tell James (Acts 12:17);
- vi. James was a leader of the important council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13, 12:17);
- vii. Jude could identify himself simply as 'a brother of James' (Jude 1:1), so well-known was James;
- viii. James was suffered martyrdom by stoning c. A.D. 62.

The Message

The book of James reveals a noncompromising life by faith. ***“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face various temptations, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith works out endurance.”*** (James 1: 2-3).

Endurance (hypomonē) which in the Greek translates as steadfastness and constancy, cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, to stay under (behind), figuratively, to undergo, i.e. bear (trials), have fortitude, suffer, tarry.

In the New Testament, 'hypomonē' (endurance) describes the basic attitude of Christians as we wait confidently for the fulfilment of the Kingdom and our own salvation. How can we be anything but joyous? We must put this into the context of who the Epistle of James was addressed to - ***“the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.”*** (James 1: 1). So James begins the letter by recognising the strong cultural and religious roots of the Jewish Christians and recognising that they are in foreign lands (after the 'Diaspora'), isolated and alone. They have undergone and are continuing to undergo persecution, yet as James clearly says persecution, religious roots, and living as foreigners are not enough to produce faith. The development of a true faith comes from allowing “hypomonē” to finish its work in us so that we may become ***“mature and complete - not lacking anything.”*** (James 1: 4).

Do we believe that we have wisdom? According to James we should have already prayed to receive it and we should believe that God has given it to us! If we do not believe but doubt then we are like the “wave of the sea.” (James 1: 6) and consequently unable to “receive anything from the Lord” (James 1: 7). Why should wisdom be so fundamental to our faith? Turn to Psalm 51:6 “you give me wisdom in my inmost place.” See also Job 28:18,

Proverbs 3:13, 4:7, 29:3, Isaiah 11:2, 28:29, Jeremiah 10:12, Luke 2:52, 1 Corinthians 1:17, 1:30, 12:8, Ephesians 1:17 and Revelations 5:12. In seeking wisdom we are seeking to become more and more like Jesus. Wisdom is an attribute of God which comes to us through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Yet like perseverance there is joy connected with asking for wisdom, remember how pleased God was with Solomon when he requested wisdom as his gift. (1 Kings 3:5-15). There is also a sense of discipline that is associated with wisdom, the discipline of faith that ensures our continually grappling with our doubts and wayward spirit to remain true to God. James reminds us that if we ask for wisdom from God, one of God's attributes that He is delighted to give us, and do not believe that God will "give generously" then we are "double minded" and "unstable" in everything. (James 1:8). Wisdom is an essential ingredient of our Christian character.

Questions

1. Why does James consider perseverance such an important aspect of our Christian faith?
2. What is the difference between God's wisdom and the world's wisdom?