

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

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### ***Survey of the Bible Series – The Epistle of James***

(SB\_James\_Lsn1)

In our introduction to this book, we examined the salutation in verse 1 as well as discussed the historical background and context for the letter. In today's study, we will observe a more complete outline for the letter as well as a portion of the letter's content.

#### **Outline**

SALUTATION (1:1)

PROLOGUE – RESPOND PROPERLY TO TRIALS (1:2-18)

- Embrace trials (1:2-11)
- Do not blame God (1:12-18)

THEME – BE SWIFT TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO WRATH (1:19-20)

BODY OF THE LETTER: CULTIVATING THE BEHAVIOR (1:21-5:6)

- Be Swift to Hear (1:21-2:26)
  - Involves more than listening; involves good works (1:21-27)
  - Demonstrated by impartiality in treatment of others (2:1-13)
  - Demonstrated by the combination of faith and good works (2:14-26)
- Be Slow to Speak (3:1-18)
  - Control the tongue (3:1-12)
  - Conduct demonstrates wisdom (3:13-18)
- Be Slow to Wrath (4:1-5:6)
  - Wrath is created by worldliness (4:1-5)
  - Wrath is cured by humility (4:6-5:6)
    - Humility is demonstrated by repentance from sin (4:6-10)
    - Humility is demonstrated by restraint in speech (4:11-12)
    - Humility is demonstrated by reluctance to boast (4:13-5:6)

EPILOGUE: PERSEVERE IN TRIALS (5:7-20)

- Perseverance will be properly rewarded (5:7-11)
- Perseverance is empowered through prayer (5:12-20)

We can easily relate James' teaching in our passage in regard to the subject of patience (endurance) in the midst of trials (suffering) to the information we have previously studied regarding the divine power sphere. The concepts (James' teaching regarding the believer's attitude in testing and the divine power sphere) are the same even though the terminology may be different. Remember the components of the divine power sphere that we've studied on previous occasions:

- Component #1 – Yieldedness to the Holy Spirit
- Component #2 – Objectivity
- Component #3 – Teach-ability (Humility)
- Component #4 – Spiritual Momentum
- Component #5 – Personal Love for God (Motivational Virtue)

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- Component #6 – Impersonal (Unconditional) Love for Mankind (Functional Virtue)
- Component #7 – Momentum Testing
- Component #8 – Sharing God’s Happiness

In Ephesians 6:10, Paul says “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.”

- Paul teaches that the power or strength to endure the testing comes from God, not man.
- James is dealing with related concepts in our passage with an emphasis upon enduring with patience the testing that is necessary to refine the believer’s character.
- James is not dealing with the source of empowerment; rather, James is addressing the effect of testing – the effect in the believer’s life and the effect upon those who observe the believer’s life as a testimony.

In historical context, James is encouraging persecuted Jewish believers who are dispersed across the land of Palestine and the Roman Empire. These early Jewish believers were facing a very real crisis of faith – a test of their continuing trust in God. The test – could all of this information about this Jesus really be true if they were being tested so aggressively? As Jews in the Roman Empire, they had enjoyed a relatively peaceful status – at least to that point in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D.

### Prologue – Respond Properly to Trials (1:2-18)

*Embrace Trials (1:2-11)*

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have *its* perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. 9 But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; 10 and *let* the rich man *glory* in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.<sup>1</sup> (James 1:2-11)

James employs an interesting literary technique in that he links clauses and sentences by the repetition of a leading word or one of its cognates. In our passage, note the following use of this literary technique.

- “...the testing of your faith produces endurance...” (v.3) cf. “...let endurance have its perfect result...” (v. 4)
- “...lacking in nothing...” (v. 4) cf. “...if any of you lacks wisdom...” (v. 5)
- “...let him ask God...” (v. 5) cf. “...let him ask in faith...” (v. 6)
- “...who gives...” (v. 5) cf. “...it will be given...” (v. 5)
- “...without any doubting...” (v. 6) cf. “...for the one who doubts...” (v. 6)
- And so on...

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

James was providing his readers with information designed to provide objectivity (component #2) in the midst of testing. James' teaching regarding testing is consistent with our Pauline-centric teaching on the subject in the past – a point that will be highlighted through the many parallels that will emerge from our examination of this wonderful book. Both Paul and James teach that testing is part-and-parcel of the believer's life. The question for each believer is "how do I interpret and respond to testing?" Do we embrace the tests (verses 2-11)? Or, do we blame God (verses 12-18)?

Most of us are programmed to think of God as the stern, unapproachable, Father in the sky. We would fill in the blank in the following sentence with the word "discipline" before we even paused to give consideration to our answer. The sentence is "suffering is the result of divine (blank)." Furthermore, we equate the word "discipline" with "punishment." We must rid ourselves of this false paradigm – even though admittedly it is deeply embedded in our psyche. Our Abba no more desires that type of relationship with His children than you do with yours. Jesus tried to break this false paradigm of the heavenly Father when He taught His disciples the following.

9 "Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will he give him a stone? 10 "Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (Matthew 7:9-11)

As Brennan Manning indicates in his book *Ruthless Trust*, "trust is our gift back to God, and he finds it so enchanting that Jesus died for love of it."<sup>2</sup> In our passage, James is recognizing the principle that the believer's spiritual character is built during the pressure of testing which testing requires endurance (patience) which endurance is built upon a trusting relationship with the heavenly Abba. Only the believer who possesses objectivity can understand and accept that pressure in life is part-and-parcel of the spiritual conflict into which we are inserted at birth and that it is not always (in fact relatively rarely) the result of God's punishment. Therefore, we must objectively evaluate the source of testing. Is the testing a result of bad decisions on our part OR is the suffering (testing) that which is the lot of the believer who is committed to Christ – at risk of being labeled "un-cool" in a so "cool" world.

If we are not yielded to God's work in our lives (component #1), then we will fail to embrace testing with objectivity (component #2) and humility (component #3) and we will never develop the spiritual momentum (component #4) in our Christian lives that will propel us forward toward the development of Christian character. Instead, as James teaches in the next passage, we will be tempted to blame God instead of trust Abba. Christian character will be manifest through a personal love for God (component #5), acts of self-sacrificial love towards man (impersonal love toward man – component #6) and capacity to endure even greater testing (momentum testing – component #7). Only then will we truly be content in all things and share in the happiness of God (component #8).

An examination of verse 2 – "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials"

Note that James teaches that we, believers, are to count it "joy" when we "encounter" various trials. The Greek word translated "joy" here is CHARA and is qualified by the adjective PAS which is correctly translated "all." James teaches that we are to have such an attitude when we "encounter" various trials. The Greek word translated "encounter" here is the 2<sup>nd</sup> person, plural, aorist, active, subjunctive of PERIPIPTO. It is accompanied by the adjective POIKILOS which literally means "many colored."

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<sup>2</sup> Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 2.

Some other translations capture the subtle nuances of the Greek in his translation of this verse as follows:

Consider it a matter for unadulterated joy [without any admixture of sorrow] whenever you fall into the midst of variegated trials which surround you.<sup>3</sup>

Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides.<sup>4</sup>

Paul, Peter and James emphasized and exhorted their readers to persevere and not waiver in the midst of adversity (cf. 1 Tim 4:12-16; 6:11b-14, 20-21; 2 Tim 1:7-8, 13-14; 2:3, 15-16; **3:12-14; 4:5**; 1 Pet 1:6-8).

12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. 13 Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. 14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery [eldership – NKJV]. 15 Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. 16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. (1 Tim 4:12-16)

Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, 14 that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Tim 6:11b-14)

**20** O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called “knowledge”— 21 which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. **Grace** be with you. (1 Tim 6:20-21)

7 For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God. (2 Tim 1:7-8)

13 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*. (2 Tim 1:13-14)

3 Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (2 Tim 2:3)

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), 539.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message, The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2002), 1649.

15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. 16 But avoid worldly *and* empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness. (2 Tim 2:15-16)

12 And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. 13 But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad* to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*. (2 Tim 3:12-14)

5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tim 4:5)

**3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet 1:3-9)

James is encouraging us to view testing from the standpoint of the end result it is designed to achieve in our lives – maturity, stability, and spiritual impact in the world as well as a spiritual inheritance of reward in eternity. James is thereby emphasizing the same principle that Paul and the writer of Hebrews taught.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:2)

How do we consider it “unadulterated joy” to have tests and adversity come at us from all sides? James answers that question in verses 3 & 4.

An examination of verses 3 & 4 – “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

If we are to represent and provide an illustration of Christ in our present world, James is saying that God is using the testing to build Christ-like character in us. The end result of this testing should thereby shape our attitude. If we have personal love for God (component #5 of the divine power sphere), it will be evident in the way we deal with testing in life. When we truly love God, we demonstrate it through our trusting attitude toward Him. When we have a trusting

attitude toward God, we are able to say with Job – “Though He slay me, yet I will trust Him” (Job 13:15).

The writer of Proverbs, Solomon, says – “If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small” (Prov 24:10). After taking his readers on a journey through the Hall of Fame of faith (trust) in chapter 11, the writer of Hebrews writes the following exhortation to us:

12:1 THEREFORE, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. (*Heb 12:1-3*)

We cannot have “endurance” out of our own strength. We are frail. Each of our personalities have been shaped by a myriad of attacks from the sin nature of others, our own sin nature, the cosmic system of the world, and Satan’s counterfeits to the Truth. Each of us would have to admit upon honest self-evaluation that we have proven our incapability in our own strength to attain to spiritual maturity. Which of us has an exemplary prayer life? Which of us has an exemplary spiritual walk? Which of us always witnesses to others through our life and through our words? Which of us always loves perfectly? Which of us does not have wounds to the soul that have cause us to doubt, fear, and not trust God fully?

The phrase that is translated in the NASV as “the testing of your faith” can also be translated as “your quality-proven faith” or “your unalloyed [pure] faith.”<sup>5</sup> This translation is more consistent with James’ intent – to highlight the fact that the testing reveals the quality of one’s faith (trust) in the same way that pure gold is disclosed through fire. As gold passes through the fire, impurities and dross are burned away to disclose the pure alloy. Without the testings of life to which James refers, then we would not have been given the opportunity to have demonstrated character consistent with the “gold, silver and precious stones” that will endure for eternity as a part of our eternal reward (see 1 Cor 3:12-15).

12 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is *to be* revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. 14 If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor 3:12-15)

Like gold that has been refined, faith (trust) can be refined. We say we have faith. We can say we trust God. However, the truth regarding the quality of our faith is only disclosed in adversity and trials in life. Faith (trust) can be purified from selfish motives, incomplete or erroneous paradigms, and previous wounds that distort and weaken our faith.

“Endurance” or “patience” is the Greek word *hupomonē*. It is a compound noun consisting of the Greek preposition *hupo* meaning “under” and *meno*. Note what *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* has to say about this Greek word – *meno*.

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<sup>5</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James – Proven Character Through Testing* (Irving, Texas: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), 19.

This word means a. “to stay in a place,” figuratively “**to remain in a sphere.**”<sup>6</sup>  
[**Bolded** phrase is mine for emphasis]

In the NT the word is an important one relative to the permanence of God in contrast to human and earthly mutability.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to the compound Greek word *hupomonē*, again note what *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* has to say.

As distinct from patience, it has **the active significance of energetic if not necessarily successful resistance**, e.g., the bearing of pain by the wounded, the calm acceptance of strokes of destiny, heroism in face of bodily chastisement, or the firm refusal of bribes. **True *hupomonē* is not motivated outwardly by public opinion or hope of reward but inwardly by love of honor.**<sup>8</sup> [**Bolded** phrases are mine for emphasis]

It is absolutely amazing as we study the very words of James to see the strong connection to the concept of the divine power sphere. We can readily see that “endurance” is a word used by James that embraces the idea of submission to divine authority and power instead of opting for an alternative, i.e. resisting the natural, default mode of operation. James’ very terminology reflects the concepts of yieldedness (component #1), objectivity (component #2), humility (component #3) and continuance or momentum (component #4). These are foundational to the believer becoming “**perfect and complete, lacking in nothing**” (Jas 1:4).

Of course, this phrase – “**perfect and complete, lacking in nothing**” – does not mean sinless perfection. Rather, I believe that James was conveying an idea consistent with the teaching of Jesus and Paul that believers should be constantly abiding in the sphere of the power provided by the Comforter (i.e. the Holy Spirit) with a paradigm of thought and action dominated by divine viewpoint perspective and submission to the authority of God. This is the believer who is not sinless, but the believer who is prepared to cope with the adversities of life in deep reliance upon the sufficiency of God’s gracious supply. Paul expresses the same principle as James.

3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (*Rom 5:3-5*)

*An examination of verses 5-8* – “**But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 *being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*”**

Sometimes, we face trials or testing in life and we do not understand them. We have difficulty clearly articulating the issues with which we are dealing when the testing seems to be coming from a dynamic complex of circumstances that surrounds us on all sides. For instance, we may be simultaneously dealing with marital problems, employment/financial issues, and

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<sup>6</sup> Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich Editors, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), electronic edition.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

personal doubts and fears – all while trying to determine where and how we can be used of the Lord in ministry to others. We need wisdom in ferreting out the issues at play. We need wisdom in order to objectively interpret our circumstances. We need the wisdom provided through a proper combination of Biblical rationales, concepts and principles. James indicates that we should ask of God who as a loving Father, provides “liberally” and “without reproach.” What decent human father would turn a deaf ear to his child who kept asking him for food or for water or for understanding the things of this world? Our heavenly Father (Abba), loves to hear the requests of His spiritual children. When His children are not asking for wisdom, they are assuming self-sufficiency (i.e. self-empowerment).

When James indicates that we are to ask for wisdom, he is not referring to new revelation from God. Rather, he is referring to illumination. Of course, the more of God’s Word and the principles, concepts and rationales derived there-from that we have incorporated into our souls, the more material that is available to the Holy Spirit.

There is one caveat – we must ask “in faith” (trust) and “with no doubting.” We must not come to the Lord with an underlying attitude of bitterness – questioning the Lord’s character and purpose in our lives. We must not be questioning the Lord’s goodness. Instead, we must possess a humble attitude (component #3) ready to receive instruction with the further development of Christian (Christ-like) character. The manner in which we respond to authority in our day-to-day lives (e.g. husband-wife, boss-employee, etc.) is an indication of how we respond to God as the authority in our spiritual lives. Do we seek to know Him intimately? Do we seek to walk in a manner consistent with His desires? Do we accuse him by blaming Him for our adversities?

When we doubt and question God, we are questioning His character, His essence. We will be tossed about by the conflicting influences of what we know about God through His Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit on the one hand and the influences of the world’s system, our own sin nature and Satan on the other.

The answer to a prayer for wisdom does not come like a bolt of lightening at the exact moment it is requested. James has indicated that it is God’s goal in trials to furnish us with those spiritual character traits which we may lack. God will answer our request for wisdom through the very trial itself if we endure the testing with an attitude of seeking His wisdom and perspective.

When we doubt, James says we are “double-minded.” This is a translation of the Greek word *dipsuchos*. A more literal rendering of this Greek word might be “two souled,” i.e. a split personality. The believer who has learned such doctrines and Biblical concepts as the essence of God, yet who doubts is in reality a split personality. On the one hand, the believer knows that he must rely on the power of God and reside in the divine sphere of power and perspective. On the other hand, the believer waivers in doubt and attempts to solve problems using human viewpoint solutions. He has not asked for wisdom to distinguish between divine and human viewpoint. He refuses to yield to the Truth and instead, yields to the default mode of human defense mechanisms and coping techniques learned from youth and from the world. The believer who waivers like this will eventually feel like a spiritual failure as his life will be characterized by a continuing series of false starts.

**Principle:** We have two choices in testing: 1) blame God for the test and question His character; or 2) trust that God will reveal Himself to us through the testing.

**Principle:** The “two souled” believer can be identified as the one who can talk the right talk, say the right words, but who has no personal experiences to share of where the Lord has been trusted and where the Lord has provided wisdom and revealed Himself to that believer.

*An examination of verses 9-11 – “But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; 10 and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will*

pass away. 11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.”

James returns to his central theme of the prologue to his letter in these verses – the proper attitude we should have towards testing (verses 2-3). The proper attitude is joy since God is using the trials to produce spiritual maturity. In verse 4, James taught that we should have endurance during testing so that God could fill up our deficiencies. Verses 5-8 have been a brief parenthesis in which James teaches us to ask for wisdom.

The “brother of humble circumstances” is the fellow believer who is not wealthy in worldly riches (cf. v. 10). We may be inclined to think that a poor person has enough problems already, so what could motivate a poor person to “glory in his high position?” James’ answer – that brother should consider his trials to be God’s form of exaltation. How can this be? James’ teaching and reasoning – because God is involving Himself in that believer’s life to shape his character and God is preparing that believer to be crowned with the crown of life (v. 12) which comes to those who endure testing. Thus, the believer who is poor in this world’s goods is really being exalted both in the midst of the trial itself (development of character) and prospectively (in the trial’s outcome).

The “rich man” should “glory in his humiliation” through testing and see it as an opportunity to remember that this world’s goods and status is fleeting. Only that which properly passes through the fire of testing in the believer’s life will endure. “Humiliation” provides the wealthy believer with the opportunity to allow the testing to bring attention and focus to God’s provision and the believer’s dependence upon God’s provision rather than that believer’s self-sufficiency. (Personal illustrations/stories: Recall theme of movie *Facing the Giants* as well as acquaintance with wealthy man in a men’s Bible study group).

The rich believer is exhorted to recall that all worldly things are temporary and will pass away. James emphasizes this point more than once – “Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (Jas 4:14).

*Do Not Blame God (James 1:12-18)*

12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.

The previous section of verses in James’ prologue (vv. 2-11) emphasized the proper attitude toward suffering that the believer is to possess. The current section of the prologue emphasizes the proper attitude toward God in the midst of testing. I have already highlighted some important principles and observations in these notes regarding both of these emphases, so I will limit my analysis of these verses to that which is unique to them.

The believer who has been “approved” is the believer who has developed the character of Christ – a character empowered by residence in the divine power sphere of influence. As we have previously noted, Paul expresses the same idea in Romans 5.

3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:3-5)

A question that arises from our passage in James is whether the crown of life is to be received now or as a future reward in eternity. I believe that both are possible. In Galatians 6:8, Paul speaks of the reaping of everlasting life in the present as we sow in the Spirit. Jesus spoke of the believer beginning to enjoy the benefits of eternal life through the improved quality of the present life – life “more abundantly” (John 10:10). God enriches our present temporal life with the refreshing spiritual water of life eternal as our present, temporal existence is made richer, deeper and more full as a result of having purpose, definition and meaning. Nothing is more depressing than continual suffering without purpose. Nothing kills the soul as does suffering without understanding or meaning. With each test, we face the temptation to resist God’s will in sending the trial at all or we face the temptation to resent it and thereby miss out on the character building exercise God intends it to be.

In these verses, James also teaches that if a believer does not love God (component #5), the wrong attitude toward testing can easily arise. James recognized the fact that not all believers would be lovers of God all of their lives. It is quite possible, as the epistles of Paul clearly reveal, for the believer to not love God.

In no circumstances more than in trials does the presence or absence of love for God in a Christian become more apparent. The crown of life, therefore, is for those who love Him, but not for those who accuse God of tempting them with evil.<sup>9</sup>

When the believer questions God’s essence, he is aligning himself with Satan’s original question of the integrity of God’s attributes which is the origin of evil. James recognizes that connection in this passage also. James also indicates that the tendency to blame God can even go so far as to blame God for our inner, sinful inclinations toward alignment with evil thought. Some believers might go so far as to claim that since God allows the testing and since God “created” them, then God is responsible and the source of the temptation. That thought pattern is not only based upon erroneous theology, but James deals decisively with it. All of the temptations that Satan’s cosmos has to offer would have no effect upon believers if it were not for our own selfish desires.

James draws an analogy between temptation and the birth process of a human. His logic proceeds along the following lines:

- Lust or desire is the “mother” of sin – conception occurs when lust is united with the volition of the individual who is not yielded to the Lord.
- Sin grows and matures – sinful thoughts and actions combine with continued unyieldedness in the believer to produce an unbelief system as opposed to a belief system built upon trust of the heavenly Father.
- Sin bears a child of its own – death of the spiritual life in time. This is consistent with James thought in 5:20 – “he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.”

Finally, James concludes his thought in this passage by making the point that God’s gift of new life is so good and perfect that when we possess His life as believers, we are a

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<sup>9</sup> Hodges, *James*, 27.

foreshadowing of what He is eventually going to do with the whole of fallen creation. This is similar to Paul's teaching in Romans 8:19-21.

**18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. **19** For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. **20** For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

This new eternal life that believers possess in time has no flaw – it is perfect. Otherwise, it could not foreshadow and serve as a model of what God desires for the whole of creation that was affected by the fall.