

## SUFFERING IN JAMES 1:2-12

TRACY L. HOWARD

Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, IN 46590

The Christian lives paradoxically in two different worlds. By virtue of his identification with the risen Christ, his spiritual citizenship has been transferred from the domain of this present age to the age to come. The Christian thus lives in an “already/not yet” tension for although the age to come has been inaugurated, it has not been realized in all of its fulness. This realization will occur at the Parousia at which time the believer's spiritual citizenship will be openly manifested. As W. D. Davies says, “Christians are already in the Age to Come ‘in Christ’ and . . . future events can only make this fact explicit.”<sup>1</sup> Because the Christian is no longer a part of this age, it should not be thought strange that affliction, trials, and even persecution are not only possible but inevitable. Nevertheless, it is easy to lose perspective in the midst of such circumstances and thus several questions arise: How should the Christian respond to suffering? What is its purpose for the believer? Will there ever be a resolution to this predicament? In Jas 1:2-12, the writer addresses the issue of suffering and attempts to answer some of the questions facing Christians as they live as pilgrims in this present evil age. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to offer a brief exegetical study of Jas 1:2-12 and extract several biblical principles for responding to suffering which were true not only for the original audience but which are equally valid for believers today.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 4th ed., 1980) 319.

<sup>2</sup> The focus of this article is on trials or suffering from *without* rather than on temptation from *within* which James takes up in 1:13. Certainly trials from without, if not responded to properly, can lead to temptation from within. However, in Jas 1:2-12 attention is given to *undeserved* suffering from without, namely, suffering which is not the result of the violation of some natural or moral law of God. In this article both “trials” and “suffering” are considered synonymous terms.

### I. *Background*

While several views exist on the nature of the recipients,<sup>3</sup> the most likely addressees were Jewish-Christians living in the dispersion. The use of ἀδελφοί in the vocative throughout the epistle suggests this conclusion (cf. 1:1, 16, 19; 2:1, 5; 3:10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19). The life setting, however, is more difficult to determine. Some such as M. Dibelius virtually abandon any attempt to discover a setting or local situation, believing the material to be a miscellaneous collection of traditional teachings from various sources without any coherence in theme or theology.<sup>4</sup> However, P. Davids has responded to this conclusion by proposing that the epistle is primarily *Leidenstheologie*, namely, a theology of suffering.<sup>5</sup> This would be true particularly in connection with Jas 1:2-12 in which the writer sets forth the subject of "trials from without." It is possible that these believers had been scattered from Jerusalem because of persecution and James writes to encourage them in the midst of suffering in the dispersion (cf. Acts 8:14; 11:19-20).<sup>6</sup>

### II. *Interpretation*

#### *Exhortations Regarding Suffering (1:2-8)*

The believer in this present world is embroiled in a war between good and evil. The consequences of war is that one faces battles, in which case one must be prepared. James exhorts the believer that when he faces the battle of trials he should respond two ways: 1) with an attitude of joy and 2) with prayer for wisdom.

*Exhortation to Respond with Joy* (vv 2-4). A proper response to trials is essential for any hope of victory. The believer is thus exhorted

<sup>3</sup> For example, J. Adamson (*The Epistle of James* [NIC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1976] 49-51) interprets ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ as including both Christian and non-Christian Jews. Others take the phrase figuratively as denoting Christendom in general which is conceived as the true Israel, and thus inherits the rights of the ancient people of God (cf. James Moffatt, *The General Epistles* [MNTC; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928] 469; also James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1916] 118).

<sup>4</sup> M. Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia Fortress, 1975) 47.

<sup>5</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982) 28-34; "Theological Perspectives on the Epistle of James," *JETS* 23 (1980) 97-103.

<sup>6</sup> Donald W. Burdick, "James," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (12 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 12.167.

“to consider” the occasion of the trial with “pure joy.” By the employment of the aorist ἠγήσασθε rather than the present, James may be thinking of each special case when one encounters a trial.<sup>7</sup> The word translated “pure” (πᾶσαν) refers to the degree by which the joy is to be expressed.<sup>8</sup> The NEB renders it “supremely.” When it is used with “joy” (χαράν) the idea moves beyond the expression of simple emotion. There is no facade here either. Rather, the believer can consider the occasion of a trial as supreme or pure joy because there is the inner awareness that God is at work in his life. Furthermore, this should be the response whenever “any kind” (ποικίλοις) of trial occurs.<sup>9</sup> The word for “trials” (πειρασμοῖς) describes things that put a person to the test. It can describe either a trial or difficulty from without, such as physical persecution or even economic oppression, or an inner moral test, such as the enticement to sin. From the context, it would appear that 1:2-4, 12 refer to the former sense and 1:13-18 describe the latter meaning.<sup>10</sup> The reason for this is that *trials* are *endured* whereas *temptation* is *resisted* and in both vv 3 and 12, James discusses the importance of enduring trials when they occur.<sup>11</sup>

The basis for the exhortation is given in v 3 through the use of the causal participle γινώσκοντες. The NASB translation obscures the semantic connection with the preceding clause by rendering it simply “knowing.” A more precise connection might be “because you are aware.”<sup>12</sup> Specifically, these believers are aware that the means of testing their faith produces endurance (τὸ δοκίμιον ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως κατεργάζεται ὑπομονήν). James shifts his terminology from πειρασμός (v 2) to δοκίμιον, thus creating a shift in tone<sup>13</sup> This shift is necessary

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. H. Moulton, ‘Prolegomena,’ in *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (4 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908) 1.173-74.

<sup>8</sup> BAGD 631; see also Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James* (London: Macmillan, 1913) 32; Ropes, *James* 129.

<sup>9</sup> The adjective ποικίλος literally means “of various kinds, diversified, manifold” and should include more than just physical persecution (cf. BAGD 683).

<sup>10</sup> See Burdick, “James” 168; D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James* (Chicago: Moody, 1979) 72; Mayor, *James* 33; Ropes, *James* 133; R. V. G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James* (Tyndale New Testament Commentary; London: Tyndale, 1956) 40; see also NASB NEB NIV and RSV which translate πειρασμός as “trial”; the translation “temptation” in the KJV is unfortunate and ambiguous in terms of what James is actually describing. That πειρασμός can mean “trial” in the sense of affliction or suffering is indicated by its use in some of the synoptic parallels (see Luke 8:13 [πειρασμός] par. Matt 13:21 [θλιψις and διωγμός]).

<sup>11</sup> Ropes, *James* 133; notice the use of ὑπομονή and ὑπομένω in vv 2-4 and v 12, respectively.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Dibelius, *James* 72.

<sup>13</sup> Davids, *James* 68.

because whereas *πειρασμός* focuses on the trial itself, *δοκίμιον* is a reference to the "means of testing."<sup>14</sup> Some have interpreted *δοκίμιον*, as "the genuineness" of one's faith.<sup>15</sup> This would mean that when one is tested, the testings sift out the genuine portion of his faith and it is that aspect of faith which produces endurance.<sup>16</sup> This idea may not necessarily be absent in v 3. James might be referring not only to the means of testing but also to the approval which remains following the refining process, an idea latent in 1 Pet 1:7 and also in Jas 1:12 in which approval follows endurance.

James, however, does not say that merely the testing of one's faith is the cause for joy, but rather, the result or "accomplishment" (*κατ-εργάζεται*)<sup>17</sup> that occurs through the testing, namely, *ὑπομονήν*.<sup>18</sup> The KJV translation of *ὑπομονή* ("patience") is weak. A better translation is "endurance" (NASB) or "steadfastness" (RSV). Ropes suggests the nuance of "staying power."<sup>19</sup> The idea is unwavering constancy to faith in spite of adversity and suffering. This is not a single act but a state of character that results over time when there is a *faithful* response to testing. Moffatt writes, "Only *trial* can prove what we are made of, whether we possess this supreme quality of steadfastness or constancy to our convictions."<sup>20</sup> James' statement here echoes Matt 5:11-12 in which Jesus forges a link between joy and persecution. Jesus says that the basis for joy is the promise of great reward in the Kingdom of Heaven. Hence the hope of the future adds an eschatological dimension to the endurance of trials in the present (cf. Jas 1:12).<sup>21</sup>

Thus James exhorts believers to respond to the occasion of trials with pure joy because they are fully aware that by the testing of their faith the character trait of spiritual endurance is achieved. Yet this is

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Prov. 27:21 (LXX); Sir 2:5 in which the same root suggests the "means of testing;" I agree with both Davids (*James* 68) and Dibelius (*James* 72) that *δοκίμιον* has two meanings: in 1 Pet 1:7 the word means "genuineness" whereas here "means of testing."

<sup>15</sup> BAGD 203; see also Burdick, "James" 168; this understanding is based on the papyrus usage in which *δοκίμιον* is used as an abstract substantive to denote "that which is genuine, approved" by testing (cf. A. Deismann, *Bible Studies* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1923] 259-62).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. W. Grundmann, "δόκιμος" *TDNT* 2 (1964) 258-59.

<sup>17</sup> Note the perfective use of *κατά* (See Moulton, *Grammar* 1.111-15).

<sup>18</sup> There is absolutely no external testimony to support Adamson's (*James* 00-92) emendation *ὑπομονή*. It is pure conjecture in an effort to harmonize the uses of Jas 1:3 and 1 Pet 1:7. Hence, *ὑπομονήν* is preferred.

<sup>19</sup> Ropes, *James* 135.

<sup>20</sup> Moffatt, *General Epistles* 9.

<sup>21</sup> The importance of endurance is likewise found in Jewish tradition (cf. Sir 2:1-6; Jdt 8:25; 1Qs 10,17; 1 QH 5:15-17; 1 QM 16:15-17:3; T. Jos. 2; for a patristic example, see *Did.* 16:5).

not the complete picture, for James goes on in v 4 to describe a work that endurance performs.

The particle δέ introduces v 4 and in this instance indicates a transition to a similar theme. Furthermore, the repetition of ὑπομονή serves to link vv 3 and 4. The believers are commanded to let (ἐχέτω) endurance have its complete effect (ἔργον τέλειον).<sup>22</sup> James does not issue an option but a command.<sup>23</sup> According to him, endurance left to itself is not enough. The believer must allow it to have its complete effect, the goal or purpose of which (ἵνα) is to ensure the ethical character of the mature believer.<sup>24</sup>

James states his purpose both positively and negatively. Positively, the purpose is that the believer might be "perfect and entire" (τέλειοι καὶ ὁλόκληροι). The adjective ὁλόκληροι denotes the perfect, mature, fully developed character in a moral sense.<sup>25</sup> Hence the *perfect* effect of allowing endurance to work is the *perfect* character of the one tested. The parallel adjective ὁλόκληροι also conveys the notion of "complete, blameless, whole."<sup>26</sup> It is used here in a qualitative sense to denote the ethical integrity which characterizes the mature Christian. Maturity, therefore, is the ultimate goal of one's faith being tested.

James emphasizes this point further by adding the negative phrase "lacking in nothing" (ἐν μηδενὶ λειπόμενοι). If the negative is intended to counterbalance the positive description just given, Hiebert may be correct when he writes, "It may thus picture James' concern that in no area of their development they should fail to reach the goal, and that no part of their personality should fail to develop, leaving them in an unbalanced state."<sup>27</sup>

James recognizes that suffering is a reality for the Christian living in this present age. He also knows that through experiences of suffering, God is at work to produce endurance and ultimately maturity. For this reason, the child of God should respond not with fear or frustration but rather with pure joy. Thus from the analysis of vv 2-4 a principle can be stated regarding the believer and suffering.

*Principle #1:* The believer should respond in joy to the occasion of suffering, because it is by means of testing that the ultimate goal of spiritual maturity is accomplished. Furthermore, only by faith in God is such a response possible (cf. v 3 τὸ δοκίμιον ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως).

<sup>22</sup> τέλειον here denotes that which has "attained the end, purpose" (BAGD 809). Consequently, ἔργον is properly rendered "effect" (cf. Mayor, *James* 36).

<sup>23</sup> ἐχέτω is a present active imperative third person singular; the force is thus stronger than simple permission or allowance.

<sup>24</sup> Hiebert, *James* 77.

<sup>25</sup> BAGD 809; G. Delling, "τέλειος" *TDNT* 8 (1972) 74.

<sup>26</sup> BAGD 564.

<sup>27</sup> Hiebert, *James* 78.

*Exhortation to Respond with Prayer for Wisdom* (vv 5-8). The problem which faces the believer who is going through suffering is that there is a tendency to lose perspective and direction. It is easy for one's attention to be diverted from God to the circumstances surrounding him. For that reason James offers the additional exhortation to pray for God's wisdom. This discussion must be viewed in light of vv 2-4. This is not some unconnected exhortation. The command to seek wisdom is quite specific in terms of the suffering James has just described. Although some hold that no link exists between vv 2-4 and 5-8,<sup>28</sup> there seems to be an intentional connection through the repetition of *λείπω* in v 5 (cf. v 4b). Furthermore, the particle *δέ* is frequently used in a transitional sense without any contrast intended.<sup>29</sup>

V 5 begins with the conditional phrase "now if any of you lack wisdom" (*Εἰ δέ τις ὑμῶν λείπεται σοφίας*). While this condition does not necessarily imply the certainty of a given situation, the likelihood of such a condition existing seems evident.<sup>30</sup> The readers lacked God's perspective. They were given the exhortation in vv 2-4 to respond to suffering in joy. Yet the question remains, "how am I to see trial in this light, and make this use of it? it needs a higher wisdom."<sup>31</sup> The believer in suffering does not simply need more knowledge. Instead, he needs spiritual insight in applying what he knows in the particular situation. Specifically he needs *σοφία*. The word basically means, "Good judgment in the face of demands made by human and specifically by the Christian life, (practical) wisdom."<sup>32</sup> It involves the divine quality of the soul whereby one knows and skillfully practices righteousness.<sup>33</sup> Also wisdom is to be sought "from God" (*παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ*). This idea is thoroughly Jewish being found particularly in wisdom literature (cf.

<sup>28</sup> Dibelius, *James* 77; he feels the connection with what precedes is superficial; see also W. E. Oesterley, "The General Epistle of James," *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1979) 4.422.

<sup>29</sup> BAGD 171.

<sup>30</sup> Hiebert notes that the condition "assumes the reality of need and views it as a standing fact," James 79. He cites as justification for such an interpretation A. T. Robertson and W. Hersey Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprint 1977) 350-51. However, J. L. Boyer (see "First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?," *GTJ* 2 [1981]:75-114) has done a thorough inductive study on first class conditions and concludes that the correct explanation of the first class condition is a simple logical connection between protasis and apodosis. Hence, while the condition in Jas 1:2 is probably considered certain, the use of *εἰ* with the indicative does not necessitate it.

<sup>31</sup> Mayor, *James* 38.

<sup>32</sup> BAGD 759.

<sup>33</sup> A similar idea is found in Wis 7:7ff; 8:7; 9:10-18. The Hebrew word for wisdom (*חכמה*) is frequently rooted in a right attitude toward God (Prov 9:10; 15:33; Ps 111:10; Job 28:28).

Prov 2:6; Eccl 2:26; Sir 1:1; 39: 5, 6; 51:17; Wis 7:7; 8:21; 9:6). The command to seek wisdom is given through the use of the present imperative αἰτέιτω, suggesting that this plea is not to be a one time action. It is to be done continually. In some ways it is reminiscent of Matt 7:7 in which Jesus exhorts his audience to “Keep asking. . . keep seeking . . . keep knocking.” In a similar fashion, the prayer for wisdom should be continually offered for it is that spiritual insight which enables the believer to maintain perspective and a sense of order when everything surrounding him is in chaos.

James offers further incentive for prayer by reminding his readers that God is one who gives to all men “without mental reservation” (ἀπλῶς) and “without reproach” (μη̄ ὀνειδίζοντος). The word ἀπλῶς is a *hapax legomenon* and has been interpreted in two ways: “generously”<sup>34</sup> or “without mental reservation.”<sup>35</sup> The root certainly can mean “generosity.”<sup>36</sup> Yet one can supply evidence as well for the latter definition. In fact, that nuance is preferable for the following reasons:<sup>37</sup> 1) The meaning is well testified in extra biblical material (cf. Epict. *Diss.* 2.2.13; *Herm. Man.* 2; *Did.* 4:7; *Barn.* 19:11); 2) The idea of “mental reservation” seems to fit better the parallel μη̄ ὀνειδίζοντες; 3) This nuance prepares one for the double-minded petitioner in v 6 whose divided loyalty renders his prayer ineffective. Davids correctly summarizes the use of ἀπλῶς in v 5: “God is, then, one who gives sincerely, without hesitation or mental reservation. He does not grumble or criticize. His commitment to this people is total and unreserved. They can expect to receive.”<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, James says that God does not reproach or scold His children for asking or berate them for previously committed sins (cf. μη̄ ὀνειδίζοντες). Instead, God is waiting to give wisdom to any child of God who asks. Thus He promises to give His spiritual insight to those who are suffering (cf. καὶ δοθήσεται αὐτῷ) without mental reservation nor by reproaching or insulting the one asking. Nevertheless, there is a condition attached to this promise.

James introduces v 6 with the adversative δέ (“but”) and with it reminds the reader that the promise outlined in v 5 is not unconditional. He writes, “But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing.” The act of prayer alone is not effectual, but instead it is the prayer “in faith, doubting nothing” (ἐν πίστει μηδὲν διακρινόμενος) that ensures God's

<sup>34</sup> BAGD 86; Burdick, “James” 169; Ropes *James* 140.

<sup>35</sup> Adamson, *James* 56; Davids, *James* 72-73; Dibelius, *James* 79; Mayor, *James* 39.

<sup>36</sup> See *T. Iss.* 3:8; *Jos. Ant.* 7:332; 2 Cor 8:2; 9:11.

<sup>37</sup> For a thorough analysis of this issue, see Davids, *James* 72-73 and Dibelius, *James* 77-79.

<sup>38</sup> Davids, *James* 73.

response. The phrase ἐν πίστει is a circumlocution for "let him believe God when he asks." Adamson interprets the phrase as, "confidence in prayer."<sup>39</sup> This is a clear indicator that the life of faith is important for James.<sup>40</sup> Faith is that which God tests in order to bring about maturity (v 3) and it is faith that promises God's response to one's plea for wisdom. The phrase μηδὲν διακρινόμενος serves to emphasize ἐν πίστει. It describes one who is controlled by indecision and uncertainty and who has difficulty making choices when faced with alternatives.<sup>41</sup> This person wrestles with himself wanting things asked for yet then desiring something else. In fact, James likens him to "a surge of the sea being moved and blown by the wind" (κλύδωνι θαλάσσης ἀνεμιζομένω καὶ ῥιπιζομένω).<sup>42</sup> The passive participle ἀνεμιζομένω is a *hapax*; *legomenon* and means a "surf moved and tossed by the wind,"<sup>43</sup> while ῥιπιζομένω, also passive, denotes that which "blows here and there, the toss of the wind that sets a wave in motion on the water."<sup>44</sup> The picture is that of instability or inconsistency. The person who doubts fails to believe that God can really do what is requested and thus is the opposite of one like Abraham who did not *waver* in unbelief (cf. Rom 4:20).<sup>45</sup>

James goes on to say in v 7 that such a person should "not expect that he will receive anything from the Lord." The phrase "let not that man expect" is emphatic. The use of μή with the present imperative οἴεσθω indicates that one who doubts should stop thinking that God will respond to his prayer.<sup>46</sup> The reason is then addressed in v 8.<sup>47</sup> Ineffective prayer, according to James, is due to being "double-minded" (δίψυχος) and "unstable" (ἀκατάστατος). The word δίψυχος

<sup>39</sup> Adamson, *James* 57; a similar idea is found in Sir 7:10 which says, "be not fainthearted when thou makest thy prayer, and neglect not to give alms" (APOT).

<sup>40</sup> Mayor (*James* 38) goes too far when he says that "wisdom" is the principle thing to which James gives prominence even as Paul does to "faith," John to "love," and Peter to "hope." James also places great stress on faith; in fact, he mentions πίστις 16 times while only referring to σοφία 4 times.

<sup>41</sup> Adamson, *James* 57; see also Hiebert, *James* 84.

<sup>42</sup> Ropes (*James* 141) renders κλύδωνι θαλάσσης as "the billowing sea"; the idea is a succession of waves which are being swept along by the wind.

<sup>43</sup> BAGD 64.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 736.

<sup>45</sup> See F. Buchsel, "διακρίνω" *TDNT* 3 (1965) 947.

<sup>46</sup> Since James describes God the Father as the one who responds to prayer in v 5, the phrase παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου (v 7) most likely is a reference to the same person.

<sup>47</sup> There is a question regarding the precise connection between vv 7 and 8 since no verb is expressed in v 8 in the original. Two alternatives have been suggested: 1) to supply an equative verb "is," and read v 8 as a separate sentence (either "he is a double-minded man" [NIV, NEB] or "A double-minded man is unstable" [KJV] or 2) to regard v 8 as standing in apposition to v 7, best marked with a dash at the end of v 7 ("-a

literally means "double-souled" and describes one whose soul is divided between faith in God and a preoccupation with the world.<sup>48</sup> As Burdick writes, "It is as though one soul declares, "I believe," and the other in turn shouts, "I don't!"<sup>49</sup> Regarding the character of the double-minded person S. Kierkegaard said, "If it changes continually, then he himself becomes changeable, double-minded, and unstable. And this continual change is nothing else than impurity."<sup>50</sup>

A parallel description of this person is found in the word ἀκατάστατος. It contains the idea of "unstable, restless" and is used "of vacillating persons."<sup>51</sup> This kind of person lacks foundation. Such instability, according to James, extends to every area of life ("in all his ways"). This would not include just his life of faith but his dealings in everyday affairs with others as well.

In summary, James says that when the believer encounters suffering, he should pray for wisdom from God to enable him to respond correctly. However, such prayer must be offered in faith if it is to be effectual. Doubt only demonstrates instability and double-mindedness, and hence, such a person should stop thinking that God will respond to prayer offered in that manner. Based on the analysis of vv 5-8, a second principle can be proposed regarding the believer and suffering.

*Principle #2:* God promises to give the believer wisdom to respond properly to suffering if the believer offers his prayer in faith, not in doubt.

### *Eschatological Perspective Regarding Suffering (1:9-12)*

James shifts his focus slightly to how eschatological reward comes to bear on enduring present suffering. He reminds the believer that in the midst of suffering he should rejoice in the fact that his wonderful

double-minded man, unstable" [RSV]). Neither of these views, however, offers a clear semantic connection between the two verses. It is therefore preferable to supply the present participle of εἰμί (ᾧν) and see a causal connection between the two verses (" . . . anything from the Lord since he is a double-minded man, unstable. . .").

<sup>48</sup> Ropes, James 143; although W. F. Moulton and Milligan (*The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans reprint 1976] 166 [cf. Jas 4:8]), suggest that James may have coined the term, Dibelius (*James* 83) is probably correct by noting that many of the Christian witnesses point to an earlier period than the first century (cf. Ps 12:3 "they speak with a double heart" [דָּבַר לֵב בְּלֵב; LXX: ἐν καρδίᾳ καὶ ἐν καρδίᾳ ἐλάλησεν]; *I Enoch* 91:4, "And draw not nigh to uprightness with a double heart, and associate not with those of a double heart" [APOT]; for patristic citations, see Dibelius, *James* 83, n. 65).

<sup>49</sup> Burdick, "James" 169.

<sup>50</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing* (New York: Harper & Row 1938) 60.

<sup>51</sup> BAGD 30; see also A. Oepke, "ἀκατάστατος" *TDNT* 3 (1965) 447.

position in Christ will be displayed at the Parousia. Furthermore, the one who endures suffering and trials, and thus demonstrates his genuineness, will receive the gift of eternal life.

*Eternal Perspective is Necessary* (vv 9-11). Davids summarizes well the issue in vv 9-11:

Now the author introduces the topic of the rich and the poor. . . . The poor, he argues, are highly honored when they are Christians, for God has given them a high position despite their low state in the world. The wealthy, however, may seem powerful now, but God will bring them low in the end unless they humble themselves now. Here is the reversal of status indeed.<sup>52</sup>

This subsection is again introduced by the particle δέ (cf v 5). The particle is mildly adversative in that it maintains the distinction between sections, yet it still serves a transitional function and continues the theme of suffering begun in vv 2-4.<sup>53</sup> James first addresses "the poor brother" (ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινός) in v 9. The article ὁ is certainly generic denoting anyone who falls within that class. Also ὁ ἀδελφός indicates that James is addressing the Christian and not humanity in general. The adjective ταπεινός can refer to humiliation as an experience such as economic breakdown or poverty, or in a figurative sense, can be a reference to one's ethical character of humility.<sup>54</sup> Here as in Luke 1:52 the adjective is a reference to economic poverty in contrast to wealth (cf. πλούσιος; in v 10).<sup>55</sup> Thus, James is addressing the Christian who is suffering economically.

In paradoxical fashion, James exhorts the poor Christian to "glory in his high position" (καυχάσθω . . . ἐν τῷ ὕψει αὐτοῦ). His use of the verb, καυχάσθω ("to glory" or "to boast")<sup>56</sup> resembles the command given in v 2 to rejoice in trials. In fact, in Rom 5:2b-5, which in many ways is parallel to Jas 1:2-4, Paul uses the verb καυχώμεθα in the context of afflictions (θλίψεσιν). The focus, however, is different in Jas 1:9. Though suffering is still in the background, the sphere for boasting is not in affliction per se but in one's "high position." The word ὕψος literally means "height" but here it is used figuratively of one's "high position" in Christ. The poor Christian is exhorted to consider his

<sup>52</sup> Davids, *James* 75.

<sup>53</sup> Oesterley ("James" 424) and Dibelius (*James* 83) see no connection with any of the preceding discussion. Dibelius, it would appear, has pushed his form-critical analysis to the extreme; however, others do interpret δέ as transitional (see Davids, *James* 75; Hiebert, *James* 88; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James* (Minneapolis: Augsburg 1946) 541.

<sup>54</sup> BAGD 805.

<sup>55</sup> See W. Grundmann, "ταπεινός" *TDNT* 8 (1972) 21.

<sup>56</sup> BAGD 425.

position in Christ as a reason for glory. He must overlook the present distressful circumstances (his life of suffering) and see life from an eschatological perspective. This perspective provides hope in the midst of suffering, for it ensures that the one who really has the exalted position and who truly is rich is the poor Christian (in contrast to the rich man). The reality of such a hope will be manifested one day at the Parousia. James clarifies this in the following two verses.

In v 10 James underscores the striking irony of the situation by showing the contrast between the outcome of the rich man and the poor Christian. Yet, before such a neat conclusion can be drawn, the identity of the "rich man" (ὁ πλούσιος) must be addressed. Many propose that ὁ ἀδελφός in v 9 not only goes with ὁ ταπεινός but also with πλούσιος and thus should be rendered "the rich brother."<sup>57</sup> However, there are several good reasons for taking ὁ πλούσιος as a non-Christian.<sup>58</sup> First, Jas 1:9-11 exhibits similarities to Jewish thought where the rich are often contrasted with the poor remnant of Israel.<sup>59</sup> Second, James consistently uses πλούσιος to refer to a non-Christian (cf 2:27; 5:1-6). Third, the harsh words in vv 10-11 leave no trace of any allusion to a brotherly relationship, and the coming fate of the rich man is treated with great elaboration. For example, in v 10 the rich man is exhorted to glory (καυχάσθω implied) "in his humiliation" (ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ). There is an ironic twist for although he lives in luxury in this age, one day he will "pass away" (παρελεύσεται) "like flowering grass" (ὡς ἄνθος χόρτου). The contrast is clear. The believer's poverty is temporary in comparison to the eternal glory he will possess at the Parousia. However, the rich fool's wealth is temporary in comparison to the eternal loss he will experience at the Parousia.

V 11 continues the description of the ultimate downfall of one whose values are rooted in the present age. This man "in the midst of his pursuits (ἐν ταῖς πορείαις αὐτοῦ) will fade away" (μαρανθήσεται). **Μαραίνω** is a fitting description in this context for it refers both to the withering of plants (Job 15:30; Wis 2:8) and to the death of persons (Jos. Wars 6.274).<sup>60</sup> In light of Jas 5:1-7 (esp v 7), it is likely that the realization of this event will transpire at the Parousia. The imagery in v 11 highlights the judgment to come. James writes, "for the sun rises 'with its burning heat' (σὺν τῷ καύσωνι)<sup>61</sup> and 'withers the plant' (ἐξήρανεν τὸν χόρτον) and its 'blossom falls' (τὸ ἄνθος . . . ἐξέπεσεν)

<sup>57</sup> Adamson, *James* 61; Burdick, "James" 170; Hiebert, *James* 91-92; Mayor, *James* 45; Ropes, *James* 146; Tasker, *James* 43.

<sup>58</sup> For a full discussion, see Davids, *James* 77 and Dibelius, *James* 84-87.

<sup>59</sup> See Dibelius, *James* 87.

<sup>60</sup> See also BAGD 491

<sup>61</sup> It is possible that this is a reference to the sirocco which was a scorching wind blowing in from the Arabian desert that could destroy green vegetation in a matter of

and its 'beauty is destroyed' (ἡ εὐπρέπια τοῦ προσώπου). The language speaks of judgment and is not descriptive of a believer. That James is talking about the rich man himself and not just his riches is clear from the grammar of the next clause which says, "so also the rich man (ὁ πλούσιος) . . . will pass away" (παρελεύσεται). This means more than just death. The Christian dies. However, for the non-Christian rich man there is an eternal loss associated with death that will be recognized at the future judgment. Hiebert likewise recognizes that "if the rich man is held to be a non-Christian, the passage is probably best understood as eschatological: in the Judgment Day, the lowly brother will be exalted and the rich man will be brought low."<sup>62</sup>

Certainly James is not saying that a rich person cannot be a Christian. However, the context of his discussion is trials, suffering, and perhaps in vv 9-11 even oppression brought on at the hands of the rich. In this age the rich man prospers and the poor Christian suffers. Yet in the judgment and coming kingdom, God will bring about a great reversal and the present suffering will be swept up into eternal glory. This is the eschatological motivation for facing trial in the present, namely, the glory of the believer's exalted position at the Parousia. A third principle regarding the believer and suffering can now be presented from vv 9-11.

*Principle #3:* The prospect of future glory, in contrast to the transitory nature of earthly suffering, serves as a motivation for enduring present distress.

*Eternal Life is a Motivation for Present Endurance (v 12).* The first part of v 12 is reminiscent of the beatitudes of Jesus, particularly 5:1-12, while the latter part resembles Rev 2:10. James begins with "blessed is the man" (Μακάριος ἄνθρωπος). The word ἄνθρωπος is here generic referring to anyone who in this case "endures under trial." Μακάριος denotes a distinct inner, religious joy that is not dependent on external circumstances.<sup>63</sup> In fact, James goes on to say that this "happiness" is found in one who perseveres under trials" (ὑπομένει πειρασμόν). The phrase" echoes v 2. The word πειρασμός, as in v 2, describes trial or suffering from without. It is not until v 13, in which he employs the verbal form πειράξω, that he begins to discuss temptation from within. The verb ὑπομένει is closely related to ὑπομονή in vv 3 and 4 and refers to the steadfast endurance of the Christian under the difficulties and tests of

hours. However, the force of the metaphor is unchanged whether one interprets καύσωνι as "burning heat" (KJV, NEB, NIV, RSV) or "scorching wind" (NASB).

<sup>62</sup> Hiebert, *James* 92.

<sup>63</sup> F. Hauck, "μακάριος" *TDNT* 4 (1967) 367.

the present evil age.<sup>64</sup> The reference does not refer to one who never fails. The present tense here is customary or habitual and thus refers to one who by the quality of their character endures tests and refuses to give up.<sup>65</sup> This person is called **μακάριος**. The reason (**ὅτι**) is that such an individual by virtue of his endurance "stands approved" (**δόκιμος γενόμενος**). In fact, Ropes comments that, "'having shown himself approved' is another way of saying **ὑπομένει**."<sup>66</sup> The phrase **δόκιμος γενόμενος** is not to be construed as a condition ("if he stands the test"), but rather must be translated temporarily "after" or "since he is approved." As Dibelius notes, "no doubt can surface with regard to his confirmation, for here the subject is strictly 'he who endures' (**ὑπομένων**)."<sup>67</sup>

Following the endurance of trials, by which one is confirmed or approved, comes the reception of "the crown of life" (**τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς**). The metaphor **τὸν στέφανον** most likely is not a reference to the Greek athletic games but instead grows out of Judaism.<sup>68</sup> In this passage it symbolizes special honor which goes to the one who has endured trials; specifically, the honor consists of "eternal life" (**τῆς ζωῆς**).<sup>69</sup> This phrase is quite similar to Rev 2:10 in which the Lord promises the crown of life to the one who is faithful even to death. In that passage the promise likewise occurs in the context of trials (cf. **θλιψις**). The life promised is certainly a reference to eternal life to be experienced in the age to come.<sup>70</sup> The future tense in **λήμψεται** likewise indicates that James has his focus on the consummation of the age.<sup>71</sup>

James concludes v 12 by reminding his readers that this reward of life is promised "to those who love Him," i.e., the Lord (**τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν**). Some have regarded this phrase as an *agraphon* of Jesus.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., "**ὑπομένω**" *TDNT* 4 (1967) 586.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1953) 183.

<sup>66</sup> Ropes, *James* 150.

<sup>67</sup> Dibelius, *James* 88.

<sup>68</sup> For various occurrences of the metaphor **στέφανος** in the LXX, see Ps 20:4; Prov 12:4; 16:31; Lam 5:16; Ezek 16:12; Zech 6:11; see also T. Levi 8.2, 9 ("crown of righteousness"); *T. Beni.* 4.1 ("crowns of glory"); As. [sa. 9.7ff., 9:24ff., and 11:40 ("crowns of glory"); in the NT the reception of the crown is sometimes associated with the Parousia (cf. 2 Tim 4:8 in which Paul says that he expects "on that Day" to receive the "crown of righteousness;" in I Pet 5:4, the believer is promised the "crown of glory" when the Chief Shepherd appears).

<sup>69</sup> The genitive **τῆς ζωῆς** here is a genitive of apposition. The entire phrase should be translated "the crown which is life."

<sup>70</sup> BAGD 341

<sup>71</sup> Davids, *James* 80.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Adamson, *James* 68; Mayor, *James* 50.

However, the phrase perhaps finds its background in OT promises,<sup>73</sup> for "those who love Him" frequently refers to the pious.<sup>74</sup> One could argue that the phrase is James' own theological extrapolation based on sayings of Jesus like John 14:21, 23. In any case, the genuine believer is the one who stands the test and thereby demonstrates through such action his love for God. To that person is promised the glory of eternal life. It is clear that James points the believer to future hope in order to encourage endurance in the present. Hence, for the genuine child of God, future life in a very real sense, comes back and envelops present distress. A final principle can be proposed regarding the believer and suffering.

*Principle #4:* The hope of eschatological life serves as a motivation to endure and remain faithful in present suffering. Principles 3 and 4 are similar in their eschatological concern. However, the former focuses on the temporary nature of both life and suffering, while the latter focuses on the glory of eternal life with God in the age to come.

### III. Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to set forth several important principles from Jas 1:2-12 which serve to encourage and instruct believers who deal with suffering in this present evil age. While suffering remains a constant reality, the Christian does not have to buckle under its pressures. In the present, the believer should respond to suffering with joy because he knows that God is using that experience to produce endurance and ultimately maturity. However, God has not left the believer helpless but will provide wisdom if the believer asks for it in faith. Furthermore, James reminds the believer that suffering is transitory and that at the Parousia there will be a reversal of his present situation. Until that time, the believer is exhorted to endure suffering as he anticipates eternal life in the age to come.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Exod 20:5-6; Deut 7:9; see also *Pss. of Sol.* 4:25; *1 Enoch* 108:8.

<sup>74</sup> Davids, *James* 80.

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4010 Gaston Ave.  
Dallas, TX 75246  
www.criswell.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: [thildebrandt@gordon.edu](mailto:thildebrandt@gordon.edu)