

Epistle of Ya'akov (James) ~ 1:2-8

Testing of Our Trust ¹ (Faith) ~ Part 1

² Regard it all as joy, my brothers, when you face various kinds of temptations;

The specific *temptations* he addresses in this letter are the poverty and oppression experienced by the poor (1:9–11; 5:1–6; cf. 2:5–6).

Newer translations render this verse: *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.* (ESV) Why? Because the Greek word for both *trial* and *temptation* is the same. You see, what **God** will send or allow as a trial to strengthen our faith, **HaSatan** will seek to exploit to get us to sin. Conversely, what **HaSatan** throws our way as a **temptation**, **God** allows to be a **trial**. **HaSatan** wants to use the event to tear us down and wipe us out; **God** wants to use the same event to show us how faithful He is and how real He can be.

Though **Ya'akov's** command was direct and forceful, he did not preach to his audience. He identified with them. He addressed them warmly as *my brothers*. This mode of address is characteristic of the epistle. He used this familiar form no less than 15 times. **Ya'akov's** direct commands are coupled with deep compassion. It is important to note that **Ya'akov** did *not* say that a **Believer** should be joyous *for* the **trials** but *in* the **trials**.

Obviously, the question arises: How can a person find joy in **trials**?

³ for you know that the testing of your trust produces perseverance. ⁴ But let perseverance do its complete work; so that you may be complete and whole, lacking in nothing.

Jewish tradition repeatedly stressed the virtue of enduring testings and occasionally stressed joy in them due to trust in **God's** sovereignty. It's one thing to tell your teacher that you know the material; it's another thing to write the correct answers on a test. Similarly, you may claim to believe and follow **God**, but how do you respond when he tests your faith and pushes your buttons? **God** is working to produce **perseverance** in you. Don't try to short-circuit a trial by illegitimately seeking to exit it. **God** is trying to make you spiritually *complete and whole*. The conflict you experience in the physical world is a means He uses to draw your attention to something in the spiritual world.

Trials can be faced with joy because, infused with **trust**, **perseverance** results, and if **perseverance** goes full-term, it will develop a thoroughly mature **Believer** who lacks nothing. He will indeed be all **God** wants him to be.

Ya'akov's argument may seem logical, but it is still difficult to see how **trials** can be welcomed with an attitude of joy. Where does one turn for help to understand this paradox?

⁵ Now, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

What should you do when trouble begins? Pray. **Ask God** for *wisdom*, which is the ability to apply spiritual truth to life's circumstances. He promises to give you the **wisdom** to respond to your **trials** with maximum spiritual benefit.

Ya'akov's Jewish audience recognized this as the understanding and practical skill necessary to live life to **God's** glory. It was not a **wisdom** of philosophical speculation, but the **wisdom** contained in the pure and

¹ Recall that the Complete Jewish Bible translates the Hebrew word for *faith* as *trust*.

peaceable absolutes of **God's** will revealed in His Word and lived out. Only such divine **wisdom** enables **Believers** to be joyous and submissive in the **trials** of life.

⁶ But let him ask in trust, doubting nothing; for the doubter is like a wave in the sea being tossed and driven by the wind.

The image of being driven on the sea was familiar in Greek literature and occurred in **Jewish wisdom** texts; cf. especially Isaiah 57:20 and the saying about the insincere in Ecclesiasticus 33:2. In the context of **Ya'akov**, asking for **wisdom** in faith means committing oneself to obey what **God** reveals (Jas 2:14–26).

⁷ Indeed, that person should not think that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ because he is double-minded, unstable in all his ways. ~ Ya'akov 1:2-8 (CJB).

Jewish wisdom texts condemn the double-minded or double-tongued person (cf. also 1 Chron 12:33; Ps 12:2); like philosophers, **Jewish** sages despised the hypocrisy of saying one thing and living another, and speaking or living inconsistently.

How does **God** communicate this **wisdom**? Primarily through His Word and secondarily through **Godly** counsel. So, after you've prayed, go to the Scriptures and see what **God** says about your problem. Then ask Him for help from spiritually-minded people who can teach you how best to apply biblical truth to it. You must, however, approach with **trust, doubting nothing or being double-minded** (1:6, 8). You can't go in two directions at once, responding to your problem from a divine perspective *and* a human one.

We will learn a little more about **Ya'akov** as we dig into what he says about the **Testing of Our Trust ~ Part 2**.