

# James 1

## Verses 2-12

### Trials and Testing

Trials in the 1<sup>st</sup> century were different than we think of today. James wrote this book most likely in the mid-40's. At this point persecution by the Jews was common for Jewish converts. James is writing to the dispersed Jews who have had to flee from this early wave of persecution. It is important for us to understand the historical context to get a deeper appreciation of "trials and testing".

Since Christians met in secret and did not worship Caesar, they were viewed as atheists. The Lord's Supper was confused with actual eating of human flesh, so they were considered cannibals. They called each other "brother and sister" so they were accused of incest. Jews used these accusations to stir up Rome against them. Rome saw Christianity as a threat of becoming a new state within Roman control.

Nero in 63 AD accused Christians of setting fires that led to the destruction of major portions of Rome. Nero made Christianity an illegal religion and the force of the Roman government could fall on those accused of practicing it. Nero retaliated against Christians for the alleged arson by executing a large number of Christians.

Roman persecution waxed and waned until ~250 AD. From 249 AD to 297 AD Roman persecution increased. Diocletian issued 4 edicts in 303 and 304 AD to destroy churches and books, imprison clergy, force sacrifices to Roman gods or be put to death. This continued until 311 when an edict of toleration was issued.

Where Hebrews 12 talks of not growing weary in the struggles, and what John describes in Revelation fit with James' statements of trials. Christians were forced to renounce their faith or face economic and physical persecution to the point of death.

### Martyrdom in the 1st and 2nd Century

- Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne

Sanctus – *Deacon of Vienne* “Now as for Sanctus, he also nobly endured with surpassing and superhuman courage all the torments that human hands could inflict, and though the wicked men hoped that the continuance and severity of the tortures would cause him to utter something that he ought not, he set the battle against them with such firmness that he would not state even his own name, or the people or city whence he came, or whether he were bond or free. But to every question he replied in Latin: ‘I am a Christian.’ This he confessed again and again, instead of name and city and race and all else, and no other word did the heathen hear from his lips. Hence there actually arose great contention on the part of the governor and the torturers against him, with the result that finally, when nothing else was left to inflict upon him, they applied red-hot brazen plates to the most tender parts of his body. 22 And though these were burning, Sanctus himself remained unbending and unyielding, and firm in his confession; for he was bedewed and strengthened by the heavenly *fountain of the water of life* which issues 23 from the bowels of Christ....

Blandina – *A woman of Vienne (France)* “For when we were all afraid, and her mistress according to the flesh (who was herself also a combatant in the ranks of the martyrs) was in a state of agony, lest the weakness of her body should render her unable even to make a bold confession, Blandina was filled with such power that those who by turns kept torturing her in every way from dawn till evening were worn out and exhausted, and themselves confessed defeat from lack of aught else to do to her; they marveled that the breath still remained in a body all mangled and covered with gaping wounds, and they testified that a single form of torture was sufficient to render life extinct, let alone such and

so many. But the blessed woman, like a noble champion, in confession regained her strength; and for her, to say 'I am a Christian, and with us no evil finds a place' was refreshment and rest and insensibility to her lot."

- Perpetua & Felicity *The Martyrdom of Perpetua is named after a woman who, along with several other catechumens (people preparing for Baptism in the Christian faith), were martyred in Carthage, North Africa, in 203 AD.* "And the mob demanded that they be put in the center, in order that when the sword pierced the bodies their eyes might join it as accomplices in the slaughter. But the martyrs stood up by themselves and moved wherever the mob wished, having already kissed each other beforehand, so that they might consummate their martyrdom by a solemn rite of peace. The others who were immobile also received the sword in silence: even more so Saturus, who had ascended first, had given up his spirit first; for he was already supporting Perpetua. However, Perpetua, so that she might taste something of pain, having already been pierced between her bones cried out, and she herself drew the unsteady hand of a young gladiator into her throat. Perhaps a woman so strong that she was feared by the unclean spirit could not have been killed otherwise, had she herself not willed it."

- Polycarp – *Bishop of Smyrna* (Western-most Turkey below Greece) "But Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance on all the multitude of the wicked heathen then in the stadium, and waving his hand towards them, while with groans he looked up to heaven, said, "Away with the Atheists." Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, "Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ;" Polycarp declared, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" The proconsul then said to him, "I have wild beasts at hand; to these will I cast thee, except thou repent." But he answered, "Call them then, 1/8/20, 3:04 PM Page 6 of 13 for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous." But again the proconsul said to him, "I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent." But Polycarp said, "Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt."

### **Verses 13-18**

#### Temptation

James illustrates a pattern of temptation that can be applied to any situation. Persecution, Pride or Greed, it all works the same.

Desire  $\implies$  Action  $\implies$  Consequences.

- John illustrates the main elements of temptation in 1 John 2:15-17
- Process was first demonstrated in Eden with Eve and the serpent. Gen. 3:6-7
- David demonstrates it again in 2 Sam 11:2-5

God gives us the good and perfect gift, beginning with our salvation and continuing without change until we are glorified. Someone offering another "gift" contrary to his will is not from God. Stand firm in the revealed truth!

### **Verses 19-26**

James goes back to something that he was part of at the Council of Jerusalem. Struggling to help the Christians understand what part of the Law may still apply. Acts 15:13-20. Abstain from sexual immorality. Seek to understand the differences and do not be angry with those who oppose you. Not only in word but in action will Christians be known. Our tongue is the quickest revealer of our heart.