



VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

Wednesday Bible Study - 03:12:2008

Website: www.victoriouschristianministry.org

STUDY 1: THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JAMES

Text: James 1.1

The New Testament church experienced rapid growth amidst intense persecution, the machinations of satan and deception of false prophets. Left to their own devices, a combination of these factors could have easily led to spiritual degeneration and deviation from the right path. The apostles used every means available to them (visitations, prayers and letters etc.) to stem the tide of evil and keep the church on her right course to heaven. James, a pillar in the church (Galatians 2:9) contributed his quota to the building up of Christ's kingdom by writing to the believing Jews "scattered abroad" who, for this reason would have received little attention from other apostles (James 1:1). God has service for every saint. If we will but look at the overripe harvest field (John 4:35), we will see much more to be occupied with than we have the resources for (Luke 19:13). In this study we shall merely focus on the author and the audience.

THE AUTHOR

The author introduces himself as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ". There were possibly up to 5 persons named James in the new testament:

- (i) James the son of Zebedee and brother to John. He is unlikely to be the author of this epistle as he was killed by Herod before the gospel could take root among the dispersed (Acts 12:1-2).
- (ii) James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3) cousin-german to Christ, a pillar in the Jerusalem church (Galatians 2:9; Acts 15:13; 21:18).
- (iii) James who was the father of one of the disciples (Luke 6:16).
- (iv) James who is called "James the less" (Mark 15:40).
- (v) James the brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). This James was slow to accept Christ (John 7:5: see also Matthew 13:55-58; Luke 13:24-30; Acts 13:41). He joined the disciples after the resurrection (Acts 1:14) and was possibly won to Christ through His post resurrection appearances (I Corinthians 15:7). He was also a prominent figure in the Jerusalem Church (Galatians 1:19). The privilege of being in Jerusalem did not render him close minded to the needs of those beyond.

It is generally agreed that James, "the Lord's brother" was the writer of the epistle. The most significant thing however is that he had a personal relationship with Christ, and could refer to himself as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1) – implying obedience, humility and loyalty. He was a devout believer of exemplary conduct, who was called the just, for his piety. He was so highly revered for his justice, temperance and devotion that Josephus the Jewish historian records it as one of the causes of the destruction of Jerusalem "That Saint James was martyred in it" (see also II

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Timothy 2:6; I Timothy 4:12).

THE AUDIENCE

James wrote the epistle to the Jewish believers who were living outside of the "Holy Land". It is called general epistle because it was a "circular" to be read in the churches but was not specifically addressed to any individual or Church. The recipients may have been scattered for various reasons including:

- (i) War captives, political, exiles, emigrants and economic refugees as well as settlers in other lands for business and other purposes.
- (ii) Voluntary exiles due to dissatisfaction over crumbling Jewish nation.
- (iii) Effect of the persecution that rose on the early church (Acts 8:1-5,14; 9:31-43; 10:19-26).

Whatever the reason, these Jews still retained their Christian experiences and faith in God and for this reason were severely persecuted. That James was inspired of the Holy Spirit to write this epistle is an indication that God never forget the outcast. Outward calamities are not synonymous with divine rejection. These believers would have derived much comfort, joy, courage and a sense of belonging from James's epistle. God sets His eyes upon His own at all times (II Chronicles 16:9) irrespective of the place and circumstances. James's major reasons for writing seem to include:

- (a) To reprove Christians for their degeneracy in faith and manners (James 1:26,27;2:1-8,14-26)
- (b) To prevent the spreading of those libertine doctrines, which threatened the destruction of all practical godliness (James 2:10-13; 3:13-18).
- (c) To awaken the Jewish nation to a sense of the greatness and nearness of divine judgments (James 5:6-8).
- (d) To support all true Christians in the way of their duty, under the calamities and persecutions they might meet with (James 1:2-4,12).

The believers of James's generation have all lived out their days but the Holy Ghost has preserved this eternal truths for our learning (Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:11,12; II Timothy 3:16,17) They are applicable to us today as it was to them, and we ought to pay the more earnest heed to these precious truth, "lest at any time we should let them slip" (Hebrews 2:1-3).