

## **1:1 *The Identity of James***

### **THE MARTYRDOM OF JAMES.**

JOSEPHUS (first-century Romano-Jewish historian and military leader): Caesar sent Albinus to Judea as procurator when he was informed of the death of Festus. But the younger Annas, who as I said had received the high priesthood, was headstrong in character and audacious in the extreme. He belonged to the sect of the Sadducees, who in judging offenders are cruel beyond any of the Jews, as I have already made clear. Being a man of this kind, Annas thought that he had a convenient opportunity, as Festus was dead and Albinus still on the way. So he assembled a council of judges and brought it before James, the brother of Jesus, known as Christ, and several others. Annas charged them with breaking the law and handed them over to be stoned. But those who were considered the most fair-minded people in the city, and strict in their observance of the law, were most indignant at this, and sent secretly to the king, imploring him to write to Annas to stop behaving in this way. His conduct had been wrong from the first. Some of them too waylaid Albinus on the road from Alexandria and explained that it was illegal for Annas to assemble a council without his authority. Convinced by their arguments, Albinus wrote an angry letter to Annas, threatening to punish him. In consequence, King Agrippa deprived him of the high priesthood, which he had held for three months only, and appointed Jeshua son of Dammaeus. JEWISH ANTIQUITIES 20.9.1.1

### **SLAVES OF GOD.**

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Those who seek worldly glory display the qualifications which they think they have in their correspondence. But the apostles boast, at the beginning of their letters, that they are slaves of God and Christ. CATENA.<sup>2</sup>

### **VOLUNTARY SERVANTHOOD.**

HILARY OF ARLES: Christ deigned to reveal himself to James after his passion, and eventually it became proverbial to say: "He appeared also to James."<sup>3</sup> James refers to himself as a servant, but we must remember that there are two kinds of servitude, voluntary and involuntary. The involuntary servant is a slave who fears punishment, and therefore his service does not spring from love. But the voluntary servant is really no different from a son. INTRODUCTORY TRACTATE ON THE LETTER OF JAMES.<sup>4</sup>

## **SLAVES OF CHRIST.**

OECUMENIUS: More than any worldly dignity, the Lord's apostles gloried in the fact that they were slaves of Christ. That is how they wanted to be known in their preaching, in their writing and in their teaching.

COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>8</sup>

## **1:2 *Finding Joy in Suffering***

### **COUNT IT JOY.**

ORIGEN: If you count it all joy when you fall into various temptations, you give birth to joy, and you offer that joy in sacrifice to God. SERMONS ON GENESIS 8. <sup>1</sup>

### **THE TORRENT OF THE TRIAL.**

CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: "Falling into temptation" may mean being overwhelmed by temptation, for temptation is like a raging torrent which engulfs the traveler. In times of temptation some people manage to cross this torrent without being overwhelmed by the rising tide, because they are good swimmers who can avoid being swept away. But if others who lack their strength try to do it, they are overcome.

CATECHETICAL LECTURES 5.17.<sup>2</sup>

### **PREPARE FOR TEMPTATION.**

CHRYSOSTOM: Suffering is a real bond, an encouragement to greater love, and the basis of spiritual perfection and godliness. Listen to the one who says: "If you want to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for temptation." <sup>3</sup> And again Christ said: "In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage." <sup>4</sup> And again: "straight and narrow is the way." <sup>5</sup> Everywhere you see suffering being praised, everywhere it is accepted as necessary for us. For in the world there is no one who wins a trophy without suffering, who has not strengthened himself with labors and dieting and exercise and vigils and many other things like that. How much more is that true in this battle! CATENA.<sup>6</sup>

### **A DANGEROUS LIFE.**

AUGUSTINE: Because we are human, we live a most dangerous life amid the snares of temptation.

LETTERS 250.<sup>7</sup>

### **THROUGH MANY TEMPTATIONS.**

HILARY OF ARLES: Just as the world has to pass through winter before the spring comes and the flowers bloom, so a man must go through many temptations before he can inherit the prize of eternal life. For as Paul said: "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." 8 Temptations come in three ways, by persuasion, by attraction and by consent. Satan persuades, the flesh is attracted, and the mind consents. INTRODUCTORY TRACTATE ON THE LETTER OF JAMES.9

### **HOW FAITH IS PROVED.**

OECUMENIUS: For those who have been tried and tested, trials and afflictions are the source of the greatest joy, for that is how their faith is proved. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.11

### **DESPISE PAIN.**

SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN: The Word of God ... causes us to despise all life's painful experiences and to count as joy every trial that assails us. DISCOURSES 3.8.12

## ***1:3 Patience Is the Reward of Suffering***

### **UNWANTED TRIALS.**

ANDREAS: When our Lord and God taught his disciples that they must pray to be delivered from temptation, 13 he meant the kind of temptation which we readily and willingly fall into and which does not contain any kind of trial. But James is talking about the kind of trials which are unwanted and teaches that those who struggle for the truth should not be discouraged by them. CATENA.14

### **TEMPTATIONS ENDURED.**

HILARY OF ARLES: Temptations can be endured by spiritual knowledge and faith in the Trinity. INTRODUCTORY TRACTATE ON THE LETTER OF JAMES.15

## ***1:4 Patience Leads to Perfection***

### **TRIALS PRODUCE PATIENCE.**

ANDREAS: Why do trials produce patience? It is because patience brings those who experience it to perfection. CATENA.<sup>18</sup>

### **CASTING OUT FEAR.**

HILARY OF ARLES: Perfection is the love of God, which is that very same “perfect love which casts out fear,”<sup>19</sup> that is, the fear of being tempted. Perfection is also patience, which is the guardian of the soul as Scripture says: “By your patience you will gain your souls.”<sup>20</sup> INTRODUCTORY TRACTATE ON THE LETTER OF JAMES.<sup>21</sup>

### **PATIENT ENDURANCE.**

OECUMENIUS: Why do trials produce patience? It is because trials demonstrate the purity of faith, which is made perfect by the patient endurance of affliction. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>23</sup>

## ***1:5 Wisdom Is God’s Gift***

### **THE FAITH THAT JUSTIFIES.**

AUGUSTINE: This is the faith by which the righteous person lives. This is the faith which believes in the one who justifies the ungodly. This is the faith by which glorying is cut out [Rom 1:17].... This is the faith which gains the bountiful outpouring of the Spirit. ON THE SPIRIT AND THE LETTER 56.<sup>24</sup>

### **NOT FROM OURSELVES.**

AUGUSTINE: What blessing will that man not possess who has asked for and received this wisdom from the Lord? This will give you an understanding of what grace is, for if this wisdom were from ourselves it would not be from above and we would not have to ask for it from the God who created us. ON GRACE AND FREE WILL 24.<sup>25</sup>

### **FAITH A GIFT.**

AUGUSTINE: Just because faith may be given to us before we ask for it, it does not follow that it is not a gift of God. God may well give it to us before we ask him for it, just as he also gives peace and love. This

is why we pray both that faith may be increased in those who already have it and also that it may be given to those who have not yet received it. ON THE GIFT OF PERSEVERANCE 44.<sup>26</sup>

### **ONLY GOD GIVES WISDOM.**

HILARY OF ARLES: Why does James tell them to seek wisdom? <sup>27</sup> It is so that they might have God's assurance. Only God should be asked for wisdom, not philosophers or astrologers. God gives wisdom like a fountain which never runs out of water, and he fills everyone whom he enters, but the wisdom of philosophers and other human agents is not given in abundance, and it is soon spewed out. INTRODUCTORY TRACTATE ON THE LETTER OF JAMES.<sup>28</sup>

### **ASK GOD FOR WISDOM.**

OECUMENIUS: James calls wisdom the cause of perfection. He knows that faith is tried and tested in affliction. There is no need to ask God for perfect people. What we need are wise people. This is why he encourages those who want to be on top of their afflictions to ask God for wisdom. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>30</sup>

### **SPIRITUAL WISDOM.**

THEOPHYLACT: James is referring here to spiritual wisdom, not the human kind. Spiritual wisdom is the cause of all perfect action. This is the heavenly wisdom, and when we have been strengthened by it we can do anything perfectly. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>31</sup>

## ***1:6 Have Faith and Do Not Doubt***

### **THE DOUBTER.**

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: The doubter is really full of pride. For if you have not believed that God will hear your request, you have not acted in such a way as to avoid being condemned already by the one who tests everything. The doubter has become double-minded even without wanting to be. It is therefore necessary to condemn a plague as dreadful as this. CATENA.<sup>32</sup>

### **WISDOM GROUNDED IN FAITH.**

HILARY OF ARLES: James shows that the basis of human wisdom is faith. Here he may be contending against Simon Magus, who asked the apostles to give him the Holy Spirit but did not ask in faith. INTRODUCTORY TRACTATE ON THE LETTER OF JAMES.<sup>33</sup>

### **PRIDE TURNS TO DESPAIR.**

OECUMENIUS: If a person is confident, let him ask. But if he doubts he should not ask, because he will not receive what he is not sure about. Such a person soon retreats from the faith which he does have and then backslides. This happens to him because of his pride, because he quickly despairs of ever getting something which he asks for if it does not turn up immediately. In any case, it is no bad thing if someone who thinks too highly of himself has his prayer requests turned down. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>36</sup>

## ***1:7 The Doubter Does Not Receive God's Gifts***

### **GIFTS UNMERITED.**

AUGUSTINE: Purely human merits are evil, and God does not crown them. Any good merit is a gift of God. ON GRACE AND FREE WILL 6.<sup>37</sup>

### **ASK WITHOUT HESITATION.**

OECUMENIUS: This refers to the person who asks in a spirit of haughtiness and contempt. Take away all doublemindedness, and above all, when you ask God for something, do not hesitate, saying to yourself: "How can I ask God for something, seeing that I have sinned so greatly against him?" COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>39</sup>

## ***1:8 The Double-Minded Person***

### **COUNTING ON GOD'S MERCY.**

HERMAS: Put away doubting and do not hesitate to ask of the Lord. Do not say to yourself: "How can I ask of the Lord and receive from him, seeing that I have sinned so much against him?" Do not reason with yourself like this, but turn to the Lord with all your heart and ask of him without doubting, and you will

know the multitude of his tender mercies, that he will never leave you but fulfill the request of your soul.  
SHEPHERD 2.9.<sup>40</sup>

#### **THE UNSTABLE.**

ORIGEN: We who do not follow our Lord with complete and perfect faith but yet have withdrawn from foreign gods dwell in a no-man's land. We are cut down by the foreign gods as deserters, but because we are unstable and unreliable, we are not defended by our Lord. SERMONS ON EXODUS 8.4.<sup>41</sup>

#### **TOSSED LIKE WAVES.**

OECUMENIUS: A double-minded person is someone who is unstable and unreliable. Such a person has no clear vision of the future and no sure grasp of the present but rather drifts about here and there, grasping at whatever he can. He may be compared with the waves of the sea which are tossed to and fro, or to a flower of the field which is here today and gone tomorrow. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>43</sup>

### **1:9 *The Lowly Exalted***

#### **PRIDE IN HUMILITY.**

HILARY OF ARLES: This verse applies to Hebrew slaves who were great and proud and high in their own eyes but in their slavery had become the lowest of the low. It is as if he were saying that life was harder for the rich people with whom they were living than it was for them as their servants. The boasting referred to here is not vain glory but joy in times of temptation. INTRODUCTORY TRACTATE ON THE LETTER OF JAMES.<sup>44</sup>

#### **HUMBLING OURSELVES.**

OECUMENIUS: Every good thing comes to us if we humble ourselves before God. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>46</sup>

#### **HUMILITY THE KEY.**

THEOPHYLACT: Humility is the distributor of all good things, and apart from it there is nothing which is good. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>47</sup>

## **1:10 *The Humbling of the Proud***

### **RICHES SNATCHED AWAY.**

HILARY OF ARLES: Scripture says that “whoever exalts himself will be humbled.”<sup>48</sup> Wealth is a rich man’s flower, but the elements of the universe are out to snatch it away from him. James says very little about the humble man, but it is enough, for he will receive his glory from God. But the rich are condemned at great length, so that no one will be tempted to follow their example. INTRODUCTORY TRACTATE ON THE LETTER OF JAMES.<sup>49</sup>

### **WHAT PUFFS UP BRINGS DOWN.**

OECUMENIUS: James calls the rich man both proud and humble at the same time, because what puffs him up also brings him down. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>51</sup>

## **1:11 *Fading Glory***

### **FADING AWAY.**

OECUMENIUS: The rich man is said to fade away even while he goes about his business, because anyone engaged in business knows that it can always take an unexpected turn for the worse. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>54</sup>

## **1:12 *The Crown of Life***

### **DEFYING TRIALS.**

SULPICIUS SEVERUS: Disasters are the common lot of the saints, who must suffer them. It is by enduring them and overcoming them that the virtue of the righteous has always been noticeable. With invincible strength they have defied all trials—the heavier the sufferings they endured, the more courageous were their victories. LETTER TO EUSEBIUS.<sup>55</sup>

### **ABLE TO HANDLE ANYTHING.**

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: James does all he can to encourage people to bear their trials with joy, as a burden which is bearable, and says that perfect patience consists in bearing things for their own sake, not for the hope of some better reward elsewhere. He nevertheless tries to persuade his hearers to rely on the

promise that their present state will be put right. The person who has fought the hard battles will be perfectly able to handle anything. Someone who comes through his troubles in this way will be duly prepared to receive his reward, which is the crown of life prepared by God for those who love him. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>56</sup>

### **THE CROWN AWAITS.**

CHRYSOSTOM: We see no garments or cloaks, but we see crowns more valuable than any gold, than any contest prizes or rewards, and ten thousand blessings stored up for those who live upright and virtuous lives on earth. ON THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE NATURE OF GOD. 6.7.<sup>57</sup>

## ***1:13 God Does Not Tempt Anybody***

### **GOD DOES NOT DIRECTLY TEMPT.**

CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: If ever we find ourselves afflicted by illness, grief or trouble, let us not blame God, for God cannot be tempted by evil and does not tempt anyone. Each of us is scourged with the ropes of our own sins. <sup>60</sup> SERMON ON THE PARALYTIC 17.<sup>61</sup>

### **DECEPTIONS FROM THE DEVIL.**

AUGUSTINE: By temptation in this context, James meant the bad sort by which we are deceived and subjected to the devil. There is another kind of temptation [mentioned in Deuteronomy 13:3] which is really a kind of testing that comes from God. SERMONS 57.9.<sup>62</sup>

### **GOD TESTS FOR THE GOOD.**

ANDREAS: Any testing which comes from God is for good, not for evil.... It is quite otherwise with the devil. He tempts in order to kill those whom he has tempted. Furthermore, the devil does not know what is inside us, but God knows and has given everyone his task to accomplish, according to his sovereign will. CATENA.<sup>64</sup>

### **ABANDONMENT TO OUR OWN STUBBORNNESS.**

PETER CHRYSOLOGUS: God is said to tempt when he abandons those who stubbornly fall into the snares of temptation. That is how Adam succumbed to the wiles of the tempter when he abandoned the commands of the Creator. SERMONS 70.<sup>65</sup>

## ***1:14 Tempted by One's Own Desires***

### **HEALING OUR NATURE.**

AUGUSTINE: Against this fault medicinal aid is sought from him who can heal all illnesses of this sort, not by separating an alien nature from us but by healing our own nature. ON CONTINENCE 7.<sup>66</sup>

### **WILLING CONSENT TO EVIL.**

AUGUSTINE: The one giving birth is lust, the thing born is sin. Lust does not give birth unless it conceives, and it does not conceive unless it entices and receives willing consent to commit evil. Therefore our battle against lust consists in keeping it from conceiving and giving birth to sin. AGAINST JULIAN 15.47.<sup>67</sup>

## ***1:15 Desire Gives Birth to Sin***

### **SIN IS BORN IN PAIN.**

CHRYSOSTOM: If we sin when we are drunk with pleasure, we do not notice it. But when it gives birth and reaches its goal, then all the pleasure is extinguished and the bitter core of our mind comes to the surface. This stands in contrast to women in labor. For before they give birth, such women have great pain and suffering, but afterwards the pain goes away, leaving their bodies along with the child. But here it is quite different. For until we labor and give birth to our corrupt thoughts, we are happy and joyful. But once the wicked child called sin is born we are in pain as we realize the shame to which we have given birth, and then we are pierced through more deeply than any woman in labor. Therefore I beg you right from the start not to welcome any corrupt thought, for if we do so the seeds will grow inside us, and if we get to that stage, the sin inside us will come out in deeds and strike us dead by condemning us, in spite of all our confessions and tears. For there is nothing more destructive than sin. CATENA.<sup>68</sup>

### **LUST REQUIRES CONSENT.**

AUGUSTINE: Each one of us is tempted by our own lust, so let us fight and resist and not give in nor allow ourselves to be lured by it, nor allow it to conceive anything to which it might then give birth. It is like this—lust coaxes and coddles you, it excites and urges you on, positively encouraging you to do something wrong. Do not give in and it will not conceive. If you ponder it willingly and with pleasure, then it will conceive and give birth, and you will die. SERMONS 77A.3.<sup>69</sup>

## **THE BIRTH PANGS OF DEATH.**

HESYCHIUS: The desires of sinners are the birth pangs of death. CATENA.<sup>71</sup>

## **1:16 *Do Not Be Deceived***

### **THE DECEPTION.**

HILARY OF ARLES: This refers to the deception of the heretics who think that because God rules the physical world in darkness and in light, in drought and in rain, in cold and in heat, so he also rules over human wills with the same determinateness—in good and in bad, in sadness and in joy, in death and in life. Because of this error, James goes on to add that it is “every good endowment and every perfect gift” which comes from the Father of lights INTRODUCTORY TRACTATE ON THE LETTER OF JAMES.<sup>1</sup>

### **GOD TEMPTS NO ONE.**

ANDREAS: “DO not be deceived” into thinking that temptations come from God CATENA.<sup>2</sup>

## **1:17a *Every Perfect Gift Is from Above***

### **GIFTS WITHOUT DEFECT.**

DIDYMUS: James calls God the Father of intelligent lights, that is to say, the illuminator of all rational beings, from whom, as the giver of these things, the divine gifts come to human beings. These gifts, James says, are the very best, complete and without defect, undoubtedly perfect. But as there are some people who argue from this that only the good things in life come from God, and not things which are regarded as bad or harmful, we have to recall such passages as “he brought evil on them,”<sup>3</sup> “Evil came down from God onto the gates of Jerusalem”<sup>4</sup> and so on. From these and other similar examples it is clear that bad things as well as good may come about through God’s judgment COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>5</sup>

### **A WORK OF GOD.**

AUGUSTINE: If doing something ourselves means that it is not also a work of God, then casting mountains into the sea would not be a work of God, since Matthew [17:20] and Luke [17:6] both say that this can be done by the power of faith. ON THE SPIRIT AND THE LETTER 63.<sup>6</sup>

### **ASKING FOR PERSEVERANCE.**

AUGUSTINE: You should hope for this perseverance in obedience to the Father of lights, from whom descends every good and perfect gift, and ask for it every day in your prayers, and in so doing have confidence that you are not strangers to the predestination of God's people, for he allows you to do even this. ON THE GIFT OF PERSEVERANCE 22.62.7

### **UNDESERVED GIFT.**

AUGUSTINE: Man's merit is a free gift, and no one deserves to receive anything from the Father of lights, from whom every good gift comes down, except by receiving what he does not deserve. LETTERS 186.8

## ***1:17b Coming Down from the Father of Lights***

### **THE SOUL PROGRESSIVELY ENLIGHTENED.**

ORIGEN: The soul gradually ascends to the heavens after the resurrection. It does not reach the highest point immediately but goes through many stages during which it is progressively enlightened by the light of Wisdom, until it arrives at the Father of lights himself. HOMILY 27 ON NUMBERS 6.9

### **THE LIGHTS.**

ANDREAS: The lights are either the rational powers or else those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit. CATENA.12

## ***1:17c No Variation or Shadow of Change***

### **GOD UNCHANGING IN HIS BEING.**

SEVERUS OF ANTIOCH: Hear what God says: "I am, I am and I do not change." <sup>14</sup> He remains always firm and unchanging in his being, and those who have been formed by the gospel and who have been transformed by his commands through the gift and transformation which comes from above, are called to persevere in these precepts as much as their strength permits and not to be swept away by the times in which we live. Therefore Paul also warned people, saying: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may prove what the good and acceptable and perfect will of God is" <sup>15</sup> CATENA.16

### **CLEANSSED FROM WICKEDNESS.**

OECUMENIUS: Since what comes from us lacks perfection and indeed is very imperfect, nor does it enlighten the soul, think what perfection they will have who acquire it after a happy pilgrimage through life, who with great effort have cleansed their souls from the wickedness they inherited at birth, and who have finally reached the divine splendor. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>18</sup>

### **THE ROYAL WAY EXPERIENCED AND SHARED.**

SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN: Suppose we had told you that we had freely received grace from the Father of lights, from whom comes every good and perfect gift, but that we do not care for you to receive it also. If so, we would then have deserved to become an object of abhorrence on the part of God and of yourselves. But instead we present to you the truth from Holy Scripture and from experience and show you the royal way. DISCOURSES 34.6.<sup>19</sup>

## ***1:18 The First Fruits of God's Creatures***

### **THE HIERARCHY OF CREATURES.**

HILARY OF ARLES: Just as the heavenly powers rule over the angelic creatures, so we human beings rule over the lower creation. INTRODUCTORY TRACTATE ON THE LETTER OF JAMES.<sup>20</sup>

### **FIRST FRUITS.**

ANDREAS: The birth here applies in the first instance to the Son and then by extension to the creatures. For to him belong truth and consubstantiality with God, whereas to the creatures belong honor and inheritance. The fact that the same name is used does not mean that the same honor is given, nor should things which are said by extension be taken to mean that they apply in the first instance as well. By "first fruits" James means that we are the first and most highly honored. For by "creatures" he means the visible creation, of which humanity is the most highly honored part. CATENA.<sup>21</sup>

### **OUR BEGOTTENNESS DISTINGUISHED FROM THAT OF THE SON.**

OECUMENIUS: Here James reminds us that God is immutable, which is not true of us. For if we have been born it is clear that we have also been changed. How can something be immutable if it has gone from nonbeing to being? Furthermore he adds that God has given us birth by the Word of Life, lest we might be tempted to think that his Son was also born in the same way as we are. But according to John, all things

were made by the Son, which means that he was not born along with us who have been made by him.

COMMENTARY ON JAMES.<sup>23</sup>