

THE BEREAN

"...EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY..." (Acts 17:11)

"IS ANY AMONG YOU SUFFERING?"

A STUDY OF THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

PART SIXTY OF SIXTY FOUR

There are some religious people who think that believers in Christ are, or should be, exempt from all suffering and illness. In fact, some blame all suffering on one's sins. A statement from James clearly shows this idea to be false. "Is any among you suffering? let him pray" (James 5:13). James could not have given instructions on how to respond to suffering if believers are exempt. Clearly James anticipates times when suffering will come upon those in Christ. "Suffering" in this verse involves more than illness. James refers to it later by asking, "Is any among you sick?" (James 5:14). Suffering among God's faithful is not rare. Although a few question why God allows such, we cannot question that it is a fact of earthly existence. Regardless of how righteous our life, suffering in many forms comes, and sometimes stays.

God's greatest servants have suffered. James has already mentioned Job (James 5:11). The patriarch lost his cattle, his house, his children, his health, and was left almost overwhelmed. Yet his life was exemplary. Moses suffered abuse from his brethren as he, under God's guidance, sought to lead them through the wilderness. Among the followers of Jesus some were killed. Others were beaten, abused, and imprisoned as the writer of Hebrews described worthies of old. "Others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword..." (Hebrews 11:36,37). Instead of seeking to explain why all of these happen, James tells us what to do. "Let him pray."

If you are presently suffering, here is one thing that must be done. If our present life is free of suffering, since we all can anticipate some form of suffering, we must know what to do when it comes. James is speaking of personal prayer. While prayers of the congregation are of value, James is addressing us as individuals. When things go bad we are tempted to forget God and focus our attention on ourselves. This is destructive to our physical and spiritual welfare. "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). Prayer is a powerful force. When suffering comes, don't despair. God is near, but you have to be on speaking terms with Him.

There are some conditions to being able to pray. "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears unto their supplication: but the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil" (I Peter 3:12). If you are not worshiping and serving God, you are not in a position to call upon Him. Why not obey His will? "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

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