



CHRISTADELPHIAN ISOLATION LEAGUE

EXHORTATION

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SECTION LEADER:

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Readings: Judges 2, 3, Isaiah 31, James 1

Count It All Joy When You Fall into Divers Temptations

James opens his epistle with what we may think is a strange thing to write. In **James 1:1-2** (AV) he sends "*greetings*" which literally means 'I wish you joy' but then continues in **verse 2** "*count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations*". What does the apostle mean by this? We firstly need to understand that the word "*temptations*" would be better translated as 'trials' or 'tests', but this still seems strange until we read the next verse which tells us that these trials are for our benefit to build patience so that our characters may be perfected.

This principle is illustrated by the readings for today as they describe the nations left in the land to test Israel and the time of Hezekiah, as described by Isaiah the prophet. In this there is exhortation for us as we remind ourselves of how to deal with trials in such a way to allow them to form **our** characters to fit **us** for God's kingdom.

Thorns in your sides

It was due to Israel's own failure that the trials or testing came after they entered the land of promise. **Judges 2:1-3** show Israel how they were to deal with the nations who had inhabited the land previously. They were not to make any agreement with them at all; particularly they were to remove their religious practices and not be involved in them. However, the children of Israel decided not to do this, God was faithful to His side of the covenant, it was unbreakable, but they didn't keep their side of it. Therefore they were to be a snare to them. The word snare literally means a trap but it's clear from the context of **Judges 3:4** that this was to be a test. Yahweh was not trying to catch them out but rather to test whether their reaction would be correct or not. As we see from **Judges 3:5-7**, their reaction was not correct. Had they removed the false altars, then this would not have been such a temptation for them, so they fell into a trap of their own making.

There are strong lessons in this for us. We have also entered into covenant relationship with the God of Israel. **Luke 22:20** shows the wine we are shortly to partake of teaches this; the wine is the New Testament or covenant. We have also been commanded to maintain a separation from the things of this world. **1 Peter 2:11** tells us that, as strangers and pilgrims we must abstain from those things that motivate the world in which we live. Particularly we have been instructed to keep away from the religious practices of this world, whether they are those of false Christianity or any other system. **2 Corinthians 6:15-17** make this clear showing the distinction between true and false systems of worship, Christ and Belial, the temple of God and idols being contrasted.

If we take this to ourselves, we must strive not to fall in the same way. Let us not leave the temptations in our lives to be a snare for us, as this could be a way in which we "*fall into divers temptations*" through our own failure, as did Israel upon entering the land. All too often we do fall in this way though, and so the lesson for us is to learn from these trials and become wiser from our experience.

Woe to them who go down to Egypt

Sometimes, though, it is not through our own failure that we are brought into trial, it is the Father's work in the perfecting of our characters and this can be equally difficult to bear. In **Isaiah 31:1**, against the background of the Assyrian invasion of Israel and Judah, we find the phrase "*Woe to*

them that go down to Egypt for help” opens the chapter. The chapter is speaking particularly of Judah (we can see from the references to Zion and Jerusalem in **v4-5**) but there is no mention in the historical record of Hezekiah ever seeking help from Assyria at this time. Hoshea certainly did (see **2 Kings 17:4**). We have to understand, then, that the tribulation that Hezekiah felt when the Assyrian invasion led to the surrounding of Jerusalem, was not a consequence of his own actions but rather trials to build his character sent by God. We know from the record of other scriptures (for example **Isaiah 37 and 38**), that Hezekiah maintained his faithfulness under this great tribulation and turned to Yahweh in prayer for help. The result of Hezekiah’s right response to this trial is also shown in **Isaiah 31:4-5** where God reassures him that His help will be provided in defending Jerusalem and preserving it by *“passing over”*. This phrase has the idea in the Hebrew of ‘hovering over’. Yahweh was there by His angelic ministers hovering over the city to protect it from the surrounding Assyrian army and we know from the Kings record that the army of the Assyrians was miraculously destroyed.

Here is a great example for us to follow. In **1 Peter 2:19-20**, we are told that we may have to endure *“suffering wrongly”* or falling into tribulation which is not of our own making. In such circumstances our reaction should also be to maintain our faith and turn to God in prayer for help. Our tribulations may not be as dramatic as those Hezekiah faced but may well be equally difficult for us to face on a personal level. Our deliverance may not be as miraculous as the destruction of the Assyrian army, but as we are told in **1 Corinthians 10:13**: *“God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”*.

Count it all joy

Hezekiah’s response was to pray to God and this is the advice of the apostle also. **James 1:4-5** says we should ask for wisdom from God. In this context, the wisdom is to help us endure the trials so that our characters may be *“perfected”* meaning mature, rounded or complete and has to do with learning from experience. As with Hezekiah, though, we must *“ask in faith”* (**v6**) for we know that our Heavenly Father will never let us down, He is always consistent as **James 1:17** tells us.

There is an attitude which we must avoid but which we all too often don’t. This is identified in **James 1:13** and is the attitude of blaming God for our failures. But we must recognise that God doesn’t tempt us, temptations arise from within as **verse 14-15** clearly shows. God is testing our faith so as to make us fit for His kingdom. We see similar words in **1 Peter 1:6-7**, where Peter shows us that this may bring us sadness and distress at times but that it is for our ultimate good, that our faith may become more precious than anything the world values!

The similarity between Peter’s words and those of James centres on the idea of rejoicing and Peter makes it clear that this is to do with the future glory which is our hope when the Lord Jesus Christ returns. So it is this looking forward to the kingdom which is the basis of our rejoicing, our *“counting it all joy”* for he who endures tribulation will be granted an entrance into that kingdom.

As we now focus on the emblems and the great example of our master, we think of what great tribulations he endured so that we, with him, might be delivered from the consequences of sin. In **Hebrews 12:2-3** we are told that Jesus *“endured such contradiction of sinners”*, the agony and the shame of the crucifixion (the greatest of tribulation) *“for the joy that was set before him”*. Let us, as we eat and drink, determine to do the same.

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