



Endurance unto Salvation: The Witness of First Peter and James

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Both 1 Peter and James depict a link between endurance and salvation, and yet, in deference to the Pauline epistles, this is rarely mentioned in theological writings except perhaps as an aside. Already in their first chapters, 1 Peter and James have a remarkable amount of overlap regarding the theme of endurance and its central importance for salvation. This overlap appears both in vocabulary and focus, even though the audiences and their situations are quite different: whereas 1 Peter concentrates on external trials and persecution, James focuses on inward temptations and interactions within the community. Despite these differences of audience, however, their messages remain parallel: endurance in difficulty is the key witness to the reality of a person's faith and a part of the process through which they are saved.

This question for me is one of a larger pursuit of intracanonical dialogue, of seeing how the various books teach similar things and may well help to reveal teaching fundamental to the early church. In this paper, I will not discuss authorship, but will simply assume the author declared by the text—although there are

Both James and Peter define saving “faith” as faith that dynamically perseveres, no matter the situation with which it is faced, and salvation is won only as an eschatological conclusion to such faith. For both authors, endurance is a necessary part of the salvation process, for, while salvation has been started by God’s grace, it is not something one has but the trajectory in which one perseveres.

valid reasons for seeing both texts as either written by their claimed authors or at least summaries of those key leaders' teachings.¹ As such, if the authors are James, the brother of Jesus, and Peter, the outspoken disciple and leader, there would be good reason for thematic overlap, given their years of working together, that would not necessitate textual dependence.² This paper is not concerned with proving some sort of textual relation, but drawing out theological emphases within these two epistles—particularly their first chapters—in a canonical context.

If two epistles emphasize the same theme, particularly with parallel language, it seems reasonable that the overlap—here, that endurance in trials is crucial for salvation—should be studied, much as we would examine major themes between Pauline letters. If anything, the significance is increased when two different authors agree together on a theme's importance. This article begins by a study of the type of suffering described by the two epistles, followed by an attempt to discover the relationship of endurance to salvation for these two authors, as well as a brief glimpse at Jesus' teaching on this theme. Whereas the General Epistles are usually considered individually, this sort of study helps to build a more coherent theological witness that can then be taken into broader theological discussions.

TRIALS/TEMPTATIONS: THE CONTEXT OF THE AUDIENCES

At first glance, both epistles appear addressed to the same audience. James directs his “To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion (ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ),” while Peter sends his “To the exiles of the Dispersion (ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾷς).” These are the only two letters of the New Testament to be addressed to the diaspora,³ and this, combined with the constellation of election language early on, forges a conceptual link between them from the start. Scholars generally agree, however, that the two authors use the term diaspora in very different fashions: James most likely refers to Jewish-Christians—here witnessed by his use of “twelve tribes”—for whom “diaspora” is a term of judgment. Richard Bauckham points out that Christian use of the term “diaspora” was rare, “since in Jewish usage it was uniformly associated, not simply with the condition of exile, but more specifically with God's scattering of his people as a punishment for their sins.”⁴ While there may be reason to find this allusion in James, Peter gives no indication that diaspora designates punishment. First Peter appears to have been written to truly scattered Christians, probably predominantly Gentile, for whom the use of “diaspora” is metaphorical, a picture of their state across the empire. As Reinhard Feldmeier

¹See, e.g., Karen Jobes, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 14–19; Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (London: Routledge, 1999) 16–21.

²This is in contrast to Dale Allison, *James* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013) 67–70, who argues for a direct literary correspondence between the two epistles.

³The only other use of “diaspora” occurs in John 7:35: “The Jews said to one another, ‘Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?’”

⁴Bauckham, *James*, 14.

notes, “the double expression [‘elect foreigners’] sums up the central theme of the letter: Christian existence between God’s election and society’s rejection.”⁵ Regardless of their precise reasons for choosing the term “diaspora,” for both authors the term immediately depicts a period of waiting, an interim status of chosen people who are living in expectation, not yet having seen the fulfillment of their hopes. Thus with this term, both authors invoke the “already-not yet” nature of the audience’s existence, the tension within which they—and we—still live.

There are two main Greek terms for “trials” shared by both authors: the *πειράζω* family for “temptations and trials,” and the *δοκιμάζω* group for “testing.”⁶ James 1 has eight occurrences of these terms in five verses (1:2–3, 12–14), while 1 Pet 1 has three in two verses (6–7), and a fourth in 4:12. However, the varied audiences affect the types of trials the two authors discuss.

The trials to which the author of James alludes have two focuses: oppression of the poorer members of the congregation by the wealthy, and internal struggles with temptation from one’s own desires. His focus is on the need to endure through oppression or temptation.

In general, the trials to which the author of James alludes have two focuses: oppression of the poorer members of the congregation by the wealthy, and internal struggles with temptation from one’s own desires. Although he does not limit the types of trials his audience may undergo and opens the door to a variety of adversities—such as illness, poverty, fighting within the community, lawsuits, and slander—his focus generally is on the need to endure through oppression or temptation. James uses the noun *πειρασμός* in the beginning of chapter 1 to refer to trials, most likely from an external source, and switches in verse 13 to the verb *πειράζω* and to a focus on temptations, an internal struggle. Some argue that perhaps the guiding principle here is how one responds to trials: whether by moving toward wisdom and perfection despite the trials by learning how and why to rejoice in them, or by giving way to complaining, sin, and anger.⁷ In no case in James, however, are these hardships caused simply *because* one is Christian. Many problems may come from the world’s systems and even more by accepting the values of the

⁵Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, trans. Peter H. Davids (Waco: Baylor, 2008) 53.

⁶James 1:27 also has one use of *θλίψις*.

⁷Cf. Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 90, who observes that “*πειρασμός* can be both ‘temptation’ that can cause one to stumble and ‘trial’ that brings confirmation.” Likewise Ralph P. Martin, *James* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988) 15, argues that *πειρασμός* “has two distinct meanings: (1) incitements to evil thoughts and wrongdoing, usually known under the name of ‘temptation’...and (2) trials which human beings have to endure as part of life’s adversities and hardships.”

world into the community,⁸ but the problems do not originate from their identification with Christ.

For Peter, on the other hand, the trials are more systemic, a physical or social persecution *because of* one's identity as a follower of Christ. Peter's arguments about submission in chapter 2 are rooted both in Christ's example of suffering despite his innocence, and in a concern to be witnesses to the surrounding secular society. For example, 2:12 exhorts the audience to "conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge." Peter desires that his audience be blameless, even when they are persecuted, as seen again in 3:16–17: "Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil." In contrast to James's concern that his audience endure against temptation, Peter's desire here is that they endure in blamelessness despite false accusations. Even more clearly, 1 Peter warns, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed. . . . if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name" (4:14 and 16). The emphasis on suffering *for the name of Christ* (ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ; 4:14) or *as a Christian* (ὡς Χριστιανός; 4:16) highlights the source of the trials in 1 Peter, namely, that these Christians no longer fit their culture, and their neighbors do not like it. In contrast, however, to James's subtle contempt for the world's systems of wealth and privilege, Peter is more willing to uphold governments and status quo if by doing so the readers bring glory to God's name.

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Despite these very different focuses, however, James and Peter have remarkably similar advice in their first chapters. Comparing Jas 1:2–3 and 1 Pet 1:6–7 shows noteworthy overlap in vocabulary and message. For instance, in both passages, the audience is facing "various trials" (ποικίλοις περρασμοῖς; Jas 1:2; 1 Pet 1:6–9), an acknowledgement on the part of both authors that the adversities their audiences face cannot be simply or easily categorized, and that to do so would be a mistake. Instead, by using the relatively rare term ποικίλος (various), both authors stave off evasions and excuses. Regardless of the trials one faces, they teach that *joy* is the proper response. While Peter and James use different terms for their command to rejoice, both authors begin their exhortations with the encourage-

⁸See, e.g., Darian Lockett, *Purity and Worldview in the Epistle of James* (London: T&T Clark, 2008) 117, who identifies ὁ κόσμος from which the readers were to separate themselves as the moral sphere, "the entire cultural value system."

ment to rejoice despite these trials—and even *in* the trials—because they know the outcome. This future hope, whether of Christ’s coming in 1 Pet 1:3–9 or of their own transformed character in Jas 1:2–4, is the positive encouragement that enables endurance. Also, both authors use the exact same phrase, “the testing of your faith” (τὸ δοκίμιον ἡμῶν τῆς πίστεως; Jas 1:3; 1 Pet 1:7) as the crucial stage that leads to the realization of one’s hope. Endurance is no passive misery. When understood as a test, as Feldmeier notes, “suffering now becomes a challenge and requires the highest level of activity in order to come through the situation.”⁹ Without this “testing,” endurance and faith do not grow as they ought and cannot be depended upon, but when testing is endured, faith becomes fidelity, which can lead to recognition before God.¹⁰ For both authors, there is a direct train of thought: various trials work the testing of faith, which leads to maturity and honor. Thus, despite writing to different audiences and—on the whole—having quite different adversities to address, both authors teach the same principle of endurance, no matter the source of the trial.

NO SAVING FAITH WITHOUT ENDURANCE

Both authors, then, introduce their epistles with the interrelationship between faith and endurance. While James gets far more attention on the issue of faith and works, both authors define faith partly through its relationship to the endurance of adversity. And ultimately it is only a faith that endures that results in salvation. So the first theological implication we arrive at from this comparison is this particular redefinition of true, saving faith.

While both 1 Peter and James hold this emphasis—namely the necessity of endurance to pass testing and thus prove the truth of one’s faith—they approach this destination from different paths. As seen already, they refer to different types of trials. This variation also affects how Peter and James understand the endurance they discuss, as we shall see.

For example, James uses the ὑπομένω (endurance) stem three times in chapter one in key locations: in verses 3–4, the noun ὑπομονή is the crucial result of the tested faith that in its turn brings about the desired maturity of the believer. Thus, verses 3–4 might almost be called the “life-cycle” of endurance. The believer is to “allow” this endurance to have its perfect work—the first example of anything doing “works” in the epistle—and the result is maturity, perfection, one who is complete and lacks nothing. The “work” of endurance is τέλειος (perfection), a key term for James as the goal of the Christian life. In contrast, James explicitly gives the life-cycle of desire in 1:13–15. James 1:13 has three uses of the πειρασμός lan-

⁹Feldmeier, *First Letter of Peter*, 84.

¹⁰Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 30. He notes: “Peter’s”—and I would add James’s—“use of the term ‘trial’ (πειρασμός, *peirasmos*, v. 6), which can refer to diabolic temptation just as easily as divine test, introduces this paradox: With the potential for both glory and tragedy, the very process that can develop and deepen human life (testing) is one that can stunt and corrupt human life (temptation).”

guage already discussed, here where it has changed to the more inward looking temptations of *desire*. Temptation comes when desires are not controlled, and they have their own life-cycle. If endurance leads to maturity or even perfection, a lack of endurance leads to sin, which gives birth to death. In this imagery, James echoes prior teachings and reveals the necessity of endurance for the path to life.

James emphasizes this point in 1:12 in his first macarism or blessing: “Blessed is the person who endures trials/temptations, for, having stood the test they will receive the crown of life which [God] has promised to those loving him.” The “crown of life” is generally understood to be a crown that *is* life, as in, eternal life rather than some sort of reward.¹¹ Yet this crown of life is said to come only after having endured and having stood the test. There is no shortcut.

For those who are behaving as they ought—bearing their trials with humility, caring for the poor, and enduring in faith—there is nothing to fear and everything to gain by the Judge’s presence. For those who are not, however, the reminder of the imminence of the one “with the power to save and destroy” looms as a dire threat.

In chapter 5, James changes vocabulary, using the μακροθυμέω stem, which has slightly more a nuance of long-suffering.¹² He uses it four times in 5:7–10, a section urging prophetic endurance, before returning to ὑπομονή in verse 11 for one more “blessed” statement. In verses 8, 9, and 11 we have three major theological statements that all provide encouragement for perseverance. Rather than simply needing to endure for a “crown” or a promise, here in chapter 5, the coming of the Lord is near (5:8), the judge stands near the door (5:9), and ultimately, the audience is reminded that the Lord is compassionate and merciful (5:11)—deeply relational language recalling YHWH’s self-revelation in Exod 34:6. While the first and third statements may be read as strictly encouragement, the middle mention of judgment throws a hint of warning into the mix. Allusions to judgment serve both to encourage as well as to caution. For those who are behaving as they ought—bearing their trials with humility, caring for the poor, and enduring in faith—there is nothing to fear and everything to gain by the Judge’s presence. For those who are not, however, the reminder of the imminence of the one “with the power to save and destroy” (4:12) looms as a dire threat. These exhortations apply to both the individual and the community, for the community shows some of its endurance through proper speech in encouraging and exhorting one another rather than slandering one another. Even still, James focuses on the internal as each person in the

¹¹See, e.g., Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James*, Anchor Bible 37A (New York: Doubleday, 1995) 188.

¹²Cf. J. P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Society, 1999) 25.168; 67.126.

community must learn the proper humility in their situation, patiently waiting for God's justice to be enacted.

James's exemplars should be highlighted. In this section, James points to the prophets and to Job as paradigms for proper endurance. Intriguingly, the prophets give us James's one example of those who suffered unjustly specifically because of their association with the message of God, most notably for their condemnation of the worldliness of their governments and people, boldly calling the people back to undivided worship of their God. They provide an example of perseverance in obedience in righteousness despite the hardships that caused them.¹³ James then pronounces that "we call blessed those who showed endurance" (5:11) and highlights Job as his next model—a model who persisted in faithfulness with a great deal of complaining to God. These models teach us something about the sort of endurance expected, because neither the prophets nor Job suffered silently; rather, they all directed their protests to God and remained faithful to him. All of them engaged in the process of discerning the purposes of God, and as James explains it, the audience *has seen* it: the Lord is compassionate and merciful. These models encourage the hearers towards an active engagement with their situation that does not lose sight of the truth of God's character. And whereas Peter consistently refers to the example of Christ, he also highlights Noah as a paradigm (3:20), again a model of active faithfulness despite the mockery of those around and again one where the audience can witness the positive conclusion of those painful circumstances. Each of these Old Testament models calls the readers to remember God's faithfulness in the middle of their confusion and that they, therefore, ought to remain faithful to God and turn to him in their different circumstances.

Returning to language more specifically, in 1 Peter the language of endurance proper does not appear until chapter 2. In 2:19–20, regarding slaves and setting the pattern for further explorations on this theme, Peter emphasizes three times how endurance is to work in relationships with others, particularly those outside the church. Peter speaks of this endurance as *χάρις*, the same noun James employs when he first urges his audience to count it all "joy." This "grace" is found not simply in enduring varied difficulties—often poverty—as in James, but in enduring *unjust* trials: persecution. Peter spells it out for his audience: simple endurance of deserved punishment earns nothing. In a sense, that simply wipes the slate clean. But when one is *persecuted* one actually finds *χάρις* before God, or, as the NRSV puts it, "you have God's approval." Joel Green observes that "grace" "is affiliated with 'credit,' both connoting divine approval,"¹⁴ and Peter Davids explains further: "There is no question of fame or boasting before God..., but neither is this simply 'grace' only because God's grace produced it. This endurance is an act that finds favor with God, on which he smiles with approval. It is a deed of covenant faithful-

¹³These have led Elsa Tamez, *The Scandalous Message of James*, rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2002), to speak of a "militant patience" promoted by James.

¹⁴Green, *1 Peter*, 80.

ness to the God who has extended grace to them (1 Pet 1:10, 13; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 10, 12) and as such it leads to the paradoxical joy already mentioned in 1:6–7.”¹⁵

Thus returning to chapter one, 1 Pet 1:9 provides the counterpart to Jas 1:12: the result of enduring trials. This verse simply states: “for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” The *telos* (outcome) of the tested faith is salvation, despite the fact, as verse eight reminds, the audience has not yet seen Jesus. Instead they have believed and remained faithful, and the assured result is not only future, but current receiving of this salvation. That in itself should be motivation to continue in the same way. First Peter 4:18 reminds the reader that it is hard even for the righteous to be saved, a warning directed *to* the righteous that they must continue, as 4:19 makes explicit: “Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.” Peter does not shy away from the conclusion that suffering can be within God’s will. Mark Dubis, arguing for “messianic woes” as the background to the theme of suffering in 1 Peter, observes that “the significance of κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ [according to God’s will] here is that the readers suffer not (a) because they seek to do God’s will and consequently suffer persecution, nor that they suffer (b) in a *manner* that is in keeping with God’s will, but rather that they suffer (c) because this is part of God’s sovereign purpose (as in 3:17). . . . Best rightly explains. . . ‘The Messianic woes are, of course, part of God’s plan for the consummation of all things.’”¹⁶ While not denying the eschatological and prophetic echoes in 1 Peter, there is also a simple model explanation: If Christ himself could suffer so horribly while being fully righteous, then believers—who cannot attain such pure righteousness—should certainly expect suffering and endure through it as Christ already has, seeking to suffer for righteousness’s sake alone.

First Peter may be the best New Testament expansion on Jesus’ beatitude in Matt 5:10: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus pronounced this beatitude and then perfectly exemplified it: his followers can do no less.

Like James, Peter thus gives theological motivation for the endurance. Not simply does one gain grace in God’s eyes for perseverance despite persecution, but Peter presents the model of Christ who has already gone before. Whereas James focuses almost exclusively on the future victory of Christ as the judge, 1 Pet balances future rewards with the confident assurance that Christ has already won—despite the appearances. Again, Feldmeier observes that “a sharp differentiation between present and future is not appropriate for 1 Peter, because it is his concern to inter-

¹⁵Peter H. Davids, *First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 108.

¹⁶Mark Dubis, *Messianic Woes in First Peter: Suffering and Eschatology in 1 Peter 4:12–19* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002) 176–177.

pret the present totally in the light of the future that has been opened for the believers....1 Peter again and again makes it clear how the eschatological joy is anticipated in the present joy and thus pushes back the shadows of trial and temptation.”¹⁷ But part of that victory stems from Jesus’ passion as the ultimate righteous sufferer, and Peter has no qualms against using that example to spur his readers forward in their endurance. First Peter may be the best New Testament expansion on Jesus’ beatitude in Matt 5:10: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus pronounced this beatitude and then perfectly exemplified it: his followers can do no less, Peter instructs.

A BRIEF EXCURSUS: JESUS ON ENDURANCE

Intriguingly, if both James and Peter point to the example of Jesus—even if James’s allusion in 2:1 is less explicit than Peter’s in 3:18—and if both authors may well be playing on the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, it may be worth noting one other key saying of Jesus. Twice in Matthew—in 10:22 and 24:13, both contexts of warning of future judgment—Jesus is quoted as saying “But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος, οὗτος σωθήσεται). Matthew 10:22 is paralleled verbatim in Mark 13:13, the whole of which warns: “You will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” This warning places 1 Peter’s teaching firmly within the Jesus tradition, for the persecution there comes specifically *because of* their identification as a Christian. This parallel also pulls in the final beatitudes of Matt 5:10–11 where those who are persecuted and slandered “on my account” are the ones blessed. While James does not import the entirety of that theme, his emphasis on enduring temptation and societal injustice falls within the broader call for and necessity of endurance for salvation in the wisdom and prophetic traditions. In a sense, if one should persevere when persecuted for Christ’s name, *how much more* should one endure when faced merely with one’s own desires? And in Jesus’ teaching we are introduced to the idea that salvation is something one receives at the end of enduring, a thought shared by James in 1:12 and Peter in 1:9.

WHOLISTIC WITNESS

At this point, then, we can begin to draft an idea of the importance of these two witnesses to the nature of endurance and salvation. Two books that rather fittingly sit one after the other in the canon provide a highly coherent picture, despite vast differences in audience and situation. Perhaps it is *because* of those distinctions that the witness is so effective to take to the larger theological dialogues.

For example, between James’s focus on the inward response to trials and temptations brought about simply by life in the world and Peter’s concentration

¹⁷Feldmeier, *First Letter of Peter*, 80.

on the proper response to persecution, there is no space left for claiming an exemption from the call to endure. Likewise, while James generally focuses on the more eschatological motivations for endurance, Peter consistently reminds his readers of Christ's victories already won, granting every person the necessary encouragement to continue, even when the trials are of no fault of their own—such as poverty or mockery, situations already exemplified and endured by Job and Noah. And in the midst of these distinctions, we also find the similarities: both authors push their readers toward pure lives purged of their former sinful ways. They call for love and care for others within the community, reminding their readers that the Christian life is to be lived in support of one another. Ultimately, neither author hesitates to reiterate the truth that God is the judge and that every person will eventually face him based on the lives they have lived—whether characterized by holiness and mercy or by desires and anger.

The theological impact, then, of a brief canonical reading of these two epistles is a redefinition of true faith as requiring active endurance in the path of salvation, a witness that needs to enter larger theological dialogues. Both James and Peter define saving “faith” as faith that dynamically perseveres, no matter the situation with which it is faced, and salvation is won only as an eschatological conclusion to such faith. The faith that receives the “crown of life,” to borrow James’s language, is the faith that has endured trials and temptations (1:12). The faith that reaches its *telos* in salvation, to borrow Peter’s language, is the faith that has stood the test of unjust persecution (1:9). For both authors, endurance is a necessary part of the salvation process, for, while salvation has been started by God’s grace, it is not something one *has* but the trajectory in which one *perseveres*. And this witness from the back part of the New Testament—which extends beyond 1 Peter and James to Hebrews as well as the Gospels, at the very least—*has* to be brought into New Testament theological dialogues dominated by Pauline language. ⊕

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