

The Letter of James
Bible Study Session Three
James 1:13-18

Greek NT

13 Μ η δ ε ι ς πειραζόμενος λεγέτω ὅτι ἀπὸ θεοῦ πειράζομαι· ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἀπείραστός ἐστιν κακῶν, πειράζει δὲ αὐτὸς οὐδένα. 14 ἕκαστος δὲ πειράζεται ὑπὸ τῆς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας ἐξελκόμενος καὶ δελεαζόμενος· 15 εἴτα ἡ ἐπιθυμία συλλαβοῦσα τίκτει ἁμαρτίαν, ἡ δὲ ἁμαρτία ἀποτελεσθεῖσα ἀποκύει θάνατον. 16 Μὴ πλανᾶσθε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί.

17 πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον ἄνωθεν ἐστὶν καταβαῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων, παρ' ᾧ οὐκ ἔνι παραλλαγὴ ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα. 18 βουληθεὶς ἀπεκύησεν ἡμᾶς λόγῳ ἀληθείας εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἀπαρχὴν τινα τῶν αὐτοῦ κτισμάτων.

Elberfelder

13 Niemand sage, wenn er versucht wird: Ich werde von Gott versucht. Denn Gott kann nicht versucht werden vom Bösen, er selbst aber versucht niemand. 14 Ein jeder aber wird versucht, wenn er von seiner eigenen Lust fortgezogen und gelockt wird. 15 Danach, wenn die Lust empfangen hat, gebiert sie Sünde; die Sünde aber, wenn sie vollendet ist, gebiert den Tod. 16 Irret euch nicht, meine geliebten Brüder!

17 Jede gute Gabe und jedes vollkommene Geschenk kommt von oben herab, von dem Vater der Lichter, bei dem keine Veränderung ist noch eines Wechsels Schatten. 18 Nach seinem Willen hat er uns durch das Wort der Wahrheit geboren, damit wir gewissermaßen eine Erstlingsfrucht seiner Geschöpfe seien.

NRSV

13 No one, when tempted, should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. 14 But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; 15 then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved.

17 Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

NLT

13 And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. 14 Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. 15 These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. 16 So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters.

17 Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. 18 He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.

The Study of the Text:¹

Context of our passage:

STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT
Of James²

PRAESCRIPTIO		1.1
BODY	1-194	1.2-5.20
Facing Trials	1-15	1.2-12
God and Temptation	16-24	1.13-18

For more details on Lesson 03, see <http://cranfordville.com/JasLess03.html>

Exegesis of the Text:

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Literary Context. As the above outline suggests, 1:13-18 is a continuation of the discussion began in 1:2-12, but with a slightly different thrust. The key signal of both the connection and the differences are seen in the play on the key word in both passages. In vv. 2-12, the use of the noun πειροσμός ('trial,' 'testing') serves as a boundary marker defining the beginning and ending of the unit of material in verses 2 and 12. But in verse 13, James shifts to the verb form πειράζω ("I test," "I tempt") and with this signals a shift in theme. He is still talking about experiencing those "pressure point" moments in life, but now the emphasis is on the aspect of that

¹With each study we will ask two basic questions. First, what was the most likely meaning that the first readers of this text understood? This is called the 'historical meaning' of the text. That must be determined, because it becomes the foundation for the second question, "What does the text mean to us today?" For any applicational meaning of the text for modern life to be valid it must grow out of the historical meaning of the text. Otherwise, the perceived meaning becomes false and easily leads to wrong belief.

²Taken from Lorin L. Cranford, *A Study Manual of James: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publications, Inc., 1988), 285. **Statements** indicate core thought expressions in the text as a basis for schematizing the rhetorical structure of the text. These are found in the Study Manual and also at the James Study internet site.

pressure that tempts us to do wrong and to make decisions contrary to God's will.

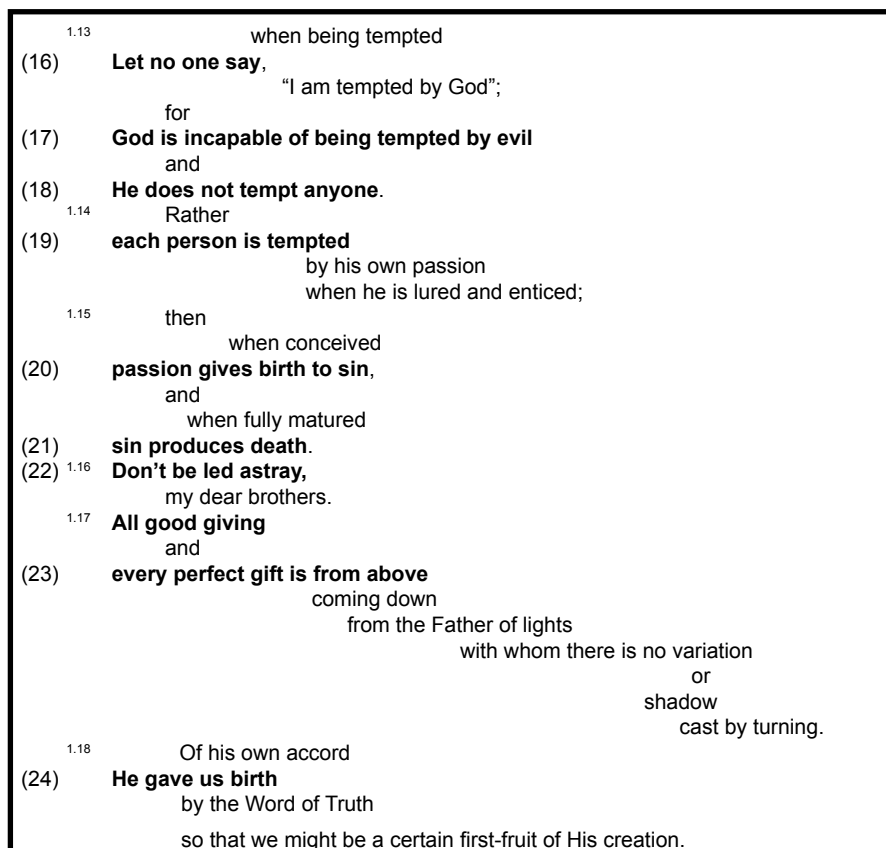
His central concern in vv. 13-18 is to identify where the temptation to do wrong originates. Every difficult moment in life presents us with the option of making bad decisions. Who is responsible for these? For this question James has two answers: 1) You can't blame God for making bad decisions, vv. 13-16. 2) You must take personal responsibility for your own decisions, vv. 17-18.

One interpretive issue, often debated by scholars, concerns the function of verse 16. Often times it is grouped with verses 17-18, which gives the words one meaning: "Don't be led astray about who God is." But I have argued in earlier publications, along with many scholars, that the verse is better grouped with verses 13-15. This gives the statement the meaning: "Don't be led astray about who is responsible for sinful decisions." This latter sense was more commonly debated in ancient Judaism and seems more appropriate to the thought flow of vv. 13-18. In either meaning, the verse 16 serves as a transition statement from the first to the second part of the passage.

Genre. As was true with vv. 2-12, verses 13-18 reflects both ancient *paraenesis* (moral admonition) and more precisely ancient Jewish wisdom literary thought expression. James pretty much agrees with the writer in Sirach (15:11-15), who said, "11 Do not say, 'It was the Lord's doing that I fell away'; for he does not do what he hates. 12 Do not say, 'It was he who led me astray'; for he has no need of the sinful. 13 The Lord hates all abominations; such things are not loved by those who fear him. 14 It was he who created humankind in the beginning, and he left them in the power of their own free choice. 15 If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice." Because early Jewish Christians were focused on the question of personal reasonability for sinful actions, more than on the role of Satan in temptation, James does not address how his views should relate to the creation narrative in Genesis 3:1-24 and the serpent's temptation of Eve in the garden of Eden. Countless speculative efforts at linking the two passages have been offered over the past two thousand years of interpretive history.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

The thought flow:



Questions for personal consideration:

1. When you face temptation, how do you cope with the responsibility for sin that may come out of it in your life? Do you try to blame God or the Devil? Or, do you take personal responsibility for your own decisions and actions?
2. Describe your image of God. Do you see Him as both righteous / holy and also loving / compassionate?
3. How much do you trust God to do nothing but good in your life?