



The Letter of James
Bible Study Session 5
James 1:13-18
“What God Does”

Study By
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Greek NT

13 Μηδεὶς 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 τίκει ἀμαρτίαν, ἡ δὲ ἀμαρτία ἀποτελεσθεῖσα ἀποκύει θάνατον.

16 Μὴ πλανᾶσθε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί. 17 πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον ἄνωθέν ἐστιν 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 τινὰ τῶν αὐτοῦ κτισμάτων.

**La Biblia
de las Américas**

13 Que nadie diga cuando es tentado: Soy tentado por Dios; porque Dios no puede ser tentado por el mal y El mismo no tienta a nadie. 14 Si no que cada uno es tentado cuando es llevado y seducido por su propia pasión. 15 Después, cuando la pasión ha concebido, da a luz el pecado; y cuando el pecado es consumado, engendra la muerte. 16 Amados hermanos míos, no os engañéis.

17 Toda buena dádiva y todo don perfecto viene de lo alto, desciende del Padre de las luces, con el cual no hay cambio ni sombra de variación. 18 En el ejercicio de su voluntad, El nos hizo nacer por la palabra de verdad, para que fuéramos las primicias de sus criaturas.

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

Bible commentators are strange people! All too often someone comes up with a different idea and, like ducks in a row, commentators line up after the new idea. Never mind the credibility of the new idea or not. What also is an established pattern is that when commentators have lined up behind a questionable idea Bible translators usually get in the same line behind the commentators. And thus the mistakes are perpetuated for decades before they eventually get corrected.

What I am talking about is the questionable paragraphing breaks in James 1:9-18. The recent trend has been to lump verse twelve with verses thirteen through eighteen, and also to see verse sixteen as introducing a new subunit of verses sixteen through eighteen. The most questionable one of these is the linking of verse twelve with what follows rather than with what precedes it. The latter has the overwhelming weight of evidence in its favor, as we discussed in the previous study. With less certainty but still with greater evidence

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.

is to see verse sixteen as climatic to verses thirteen through fifteen. Older printed Greek texts used this paragraphing structure, but the more recent editions of both major printed Greek texts (UBS 4th rev. ed. and the N-A 27th rev ed) shift the paragraphing away from the older and more accurate structure. Although either pattern does not alter the text meaning in a profound way, it does, however, have an impact on the precise meaning of both verses twelve and sixteen. In the literary setting section below, we will explore this issue in greater detail and the arguments for the patterns. Of course, one would want to remember that no paragraphing breaks existed in the original texts. They have been created by modern editors of the Greek text for clarity purposes in reading the text by the modern readers, since ideas today are separated out into units that make up paragraphs.

What James puts on the table for consideration is a crucially important point about accountability for the temptation to sin and where this originates. In the modern world of denying personal responsibility for one's actions, such a text as this needs to be heard and followed. We must take personal ownership of our actions, and especially our sinful actions, if we are to relate to the God of this universe. And for certain, we can't blame our failures on Him as though He is somehow responsible for our sinful conduct.

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

The issues of background for this passage are interesting and quite varied, both with the historical and also with the literary issues.

Historical Setting.

External History. In the history of the copying of the different books of the Bible over the first thousand years, numerous variations of wording surface among the many manuscripts now available for examination. The United Bible Society Greek text, *The Greek New Testament*, now in the fourth revised edition, contains a listing of the variations that the editors considered important enough to impact Bible translation of any given passage. Because most of the variations of wording in the different manuscripts pertain to stylistic updates, accidental mistakes in copying etc. they do not impact the meaning of virtually all the New Testament texts. Consequently these variations were not included in the text apparatus of the UBS Greek text.

In our present passage, 1:13-18, only one place shows a significant variation in the UBS text. In verse seventeen some variation surfaces with the phrase παραλλαγή ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα, [no variation or shadow due to change](#).² The intense difficulty with understanding the meaning of the expression reaches back to an early period when the copyists struggled with it and frequently sought to clarify it meaning with changes in the wording.³ The weight of manuscript evidence clearly favors



²{B} παραλλαγή ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα κ2 A C (Ψ οὐδέ for ἢ) 81 322 323 436 945 1067 1175 (1241 τρόπος [sic]) 1243 1292 1409 1611 1735 1739 1852 2298 2344 2464 Byz [K L P] Lect (I 422 καταλλαγή [sic]) it^{ar}.¹ vg syr^h.^b arm Athanasius Cyril-Jerusalem Didymus Didymus^{dub} John-Damascus; Jerome // παραλλαγή ἢ (or ἢ) τροπῆς ἀποσκίασματος κ* B // παραλλαγή ἢ τροπῆ ἀποσκίασματος 1505 (slav) // παραλλαγῆς ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασματος P²³ // παραλλαγή ἢ τροπῆ ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα οὐδέ μέχρι ὑπονοίας τινός ὑποβολή ἀποσκίασματος 2138 // παραλλαγή ἢ ῥοπῆς ἀποσκίασμα (it^{ff} ῥοπή ἀποσκίασματος) Augustine Ferrandus Primasius”

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

³“This phrase is difficult to understand, and this difficulty has led copyists to make various changes in order to clarify the sense. Manuscripts κ* and B read παραλλαγή η τροπῆς ἀποσκίασματος. But this reading makes sense only if the word η is read as the feminine definite article ἡ. This variant reading will then be translated ‘variation which is of [that is, consists in] the turning of the shadow.’

“Other manuscripts read η as the particle ἢ (or), as in the text, and read the nouns before and after ἢ in the genitive case (παραλλαγῆς ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασματος), but this is nearly impossible to translate. A few witnesses have the nouns before and after ἢ in the nominative case (“variation or change of shadow”). At the close of the verse, several minuscules add the words οὐδέ μέχρι ὑπονοίας τινός ὑποβολή ἀποσκίασματος (not even the least suspicion of a shadow).

“The reading in the text is difficult, but the other readings are even less satisfactory (see the extensive discussion of the textual and translational problems in Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, pp. 100–103). Regardless of which reading is followed, the general sense seems to be something like the following: since God is the Father of lights, who gives good and perfect gifts, God does not try to trick people into committing evil by changing in the way he deals with people. Unlike the heavenly bodies of creation, which change positions and cast different shadows, God does not change. NRSV translates the last part of this verse as

the adopted reading of the text even though it is not that easy to understand. But it makes more sense than the alternative readings. The heart of the difficulty is grasping the point of the comparison of God, as consistent, to the natural world, as constantly changing. The context makes it clear that this is what James is seeking to do, but precisely how he does it is where the difficulty arises.

In the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev ed.), which contains a text apparatus that lists the vast majority of variations in the different manuscripts, several places exist in these verses where variations of wording are found.⁴ As is typically the case, these variations do not alter the meaning of the passage and also represent efforts to update the language of the text in order to make the meaning clearer to later readers.



Consequently, we can exegete the adopted text in confidence that it represents the most likely original wording of what was written.

Internal History. Again the paraenetical nature of the text limits place and time markers anchoring the text in a particular historical situation among James' first readers. But internally the passage alludes to the especially Jewish issue of how God is related to humans in this world, and particularly to an impulse to do evil. James adamantly disallows any belief that God in some way is connected to a temptation to sinful actions. While possibly seeming strange to modern readers, there does seem to be a stream of ancient Jewish thinking that connected God to sinful action by individuals. Discovering that and understanding it can throw a great deal of light on the first part of our text.

In ancient Judaism a long tradition of connecting God to temptation existed. Connected to this is the Jewish tradition that God placed in humans at creation two impulses, one toward good and one toward evil. Then He left people with the ability to choose which impulse they would follow. Should they choose the evil impulse they would face His wrath and should they choose the good impulse then divine blessings would come their way. In some streams of thinking God somehow becomes responsible for individual's choices because He gave them the ability to choose. This thinking was opposed by many Jewish writers, including

‘with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.’”

[Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 469-70.]

⁴**Jakobus 1,13**

* απο του *pc* (the prepositional phrase ἀπό θεοῦ, **from God**, is replaced either by ἀπό τοῦ θεοῦ, **from God**, or by ὑπό θεοῦ, **by God**).

| υπο κ 429. 630. 1505. 1611 *pc*

Jakobus 1,15

* ἀποκουεῖ L Ψ 181. 323. 1739 al (ἀποκουεῖ from ἀποκουέω is an alternative spelling of ἀποκύει from ἀποκύω with the same meaning)

| txt B² M (*sine acc.* P²³.74 κ A B* C P)

Jakobus 1,17

* κατερχομενον 322. 323. 945. 1241. 1739 *pc* (this participle replaces καταβαῖνον, **coming down**, with identical meaning)

* παρα K 623. 2464 al (either παρα or εκ replaces the preposition ἀπό; all three have similar meaning)

| εκ σου 1241

* 1 εστιν κ P 522. 614. 630. 1505 al (this verb εστιν replaces ἔνι)

* π. η τ-ης α-σματος κ* B (a wide range of word variation, listed below, replaces the adopted reading)

| π. η τ-η α-σματος 614. 1505 *pc*

| π. η τ-η η τ-ης α-σμα ουδε μεχρι υπονομιας τινος υποβολη αποσκιασματος 1832. 2138 *pc*

| [π τ-ης η α-σματος Dibelius cj]

| π. η ροπης α-σμα (ff); Aug [Estius cj]

| π-ης η τ-ης α-σματος P23 [et ¹ ενι τι Fr. Hauck cj]

| txt κ² A C P (Ψ) 1739 m vg sy

Jakobus 1,18

* γαρ απεκ. 1739*^{vid}. 2298 *pc* vg^{cl} (replaces ἀπεκύησεν with either insertion of conjunction or the different verb)

| εποιησεν 614. 630. 2495 al sy^h

* εαυτ. κς A C P Ψ 945. 1241. 1739 al (replaces αὐτοῦ with more intensive possessive expression)

| txt κ* B m

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 589.]

Sirach (15:11-20⁵), Philo (*Fug.* 79⁶; *Leg. All.* 2.78⁷) and two tractates in the later Babylonian Talmud (*b. Men.* 99b; *b. Sanh.* 59b). Thus James is standing firmly in the Jewish wisdom tradition that opposed linking God to the temptation to do evil in ancient Judaism. His Jewish Christian readers both in Jerusalem and in Diaspora Judaism would have recognized this perspective and it would have had strong affirmation in light of this Jewish heritage.

Additionally one should recognize the uniquely Jewish heritage of a temptation to sin. The Greek usage of the verb *πειράζω* fundamentally means to attempt or to try to do something, usually in a questionable manner. Virtually never was it used in a religious sense, and then only in the idea of a human attempting to test the gods in the accuracy of the supposed oracles provided to their ‘prophets.’⁸ The Greek culture provided

⁵11 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.

16 He has placed before you fire and water;
stretch out your hand for whichever you choose.

17 Before each person are life and death,
and whichever one chooses will be given.

18 For great is the wisdom of the Lord;
he is mighty in power and sees everything;

19 his eyes are on those who fear him,
and he knows every human action.

20 He has not commanded anyone to be wicked,
and he has not given anyone permission to sin.

⁶“(79) There is nothing therefore of the wicked actions which are done secretly, and treacherously, and of malice aforethought, which we can properly say are done through the will of God, but they are done only through our own will. For, as I have said before, the storehouses of wickedness are in us ourselves, and those of good alone are with God.

“(80) Whosoever therefore flees for refuge, that is to say, whosoever accuses not himself, but God as the cause of his offence, let him be punished, being deprived of that refuge to the altar which tends to salvation and security, and which is meant for suppliants alone. And is not this proper? For the altar is full of victims, in which there is no spot, I mean of innocent and thoroughly purified souls. But to pronounce the Deity the cause of evil is a spot which it is hard to cure, or rather which is altogether incurable.”

[Philo of Alexandria and Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 328.]

⁷“And that which perishes is not the dominant portion in us but the subject one, that which acts the part of the multitude; and it receives death up to this point, namely, until it turns to repentance, and confesses its sin, for the Israelites, coming to Moses, say, “We have sinned in that we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray, therefore, for us to the Lord, and let him take away the serpents from us.” It is well put here, not we have sinned because we have spoken against the Lord, but because we were inclined to sin we have spoken against the Lord, for when the mind sins and departs from virtue, it blames divine things, imputing its own sins to God.” [Philo of Alexandria and Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 46.]

⁸“It means 1. act. a. ‘to attempt,’ ‘to strive,’ ‘to make an effort,’ Hom. II., 8, 8: ... *πειράτω διακέρσαι ἐμὸν ἔπος*, Aristoph. Eq., 517: *πολλῶν γὰρ δὴ πειρασάντων* ... , b. ‘to put to the test,’ esp. in a hostile sense, with gen., 2 Hdt., VI, 82: *πειρᾶν τῆς πόλιος*, ‘to test whether a city can be taken,’ c. ‘to lead into temptation’ (post-Hom.) with acc., Plut. De Bruto, 10 (I, 988b): *τοὺς φίλους ἐπὶ Καίσαρα πειρᾶν*, ‘to stir up the mind of friends against Caesar.’ 2. It is used more commonly in the mid. and pass. a. in the same sense as the act. ‘to try someone,’ ‘to put to the test,’ almost always in expression of distrust, Hom. II., 10, 444: ... *πειρηθῆτον ἐμεῖο*, Hdt., VI, 86: *πειρηθῆναι τοῦ θεοῦ*, ‘to put God to the test,’ b. with gen. of obj.: ‘to test a thing’ in order to assess its value, Hom. Od., 21, 282: *χειρῶν καὶ σθένεος πειρήσομαι*, c. often in the perf. mid. in the sense ‘to know by experience,’ Hdt., IV, 159: *οὐ πεπειρημένοι πρότερον οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι Ἑλλήνων*. Plat. Ep., VI, 323a: *πειραμένος Ἐράστου πλέονα ἢ σύ*. The word rarely has a religious sense, cf. Hdt., VI, 86 (→ line 16) and I, 46 f., where the ref. is to a tempting of God by testing the truth of the oracle, or of the god who gave it. The following derivatives, too, are used only in a secular sense.” [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 6:23.]

no background for understanding the concept of a deity attempting to get a human to commit some act of immorality. But it could easily grasp the idea that a bold and perhaps crazy person might challenge the gods to see whether they had accurately informed them of the future or else had flat out lied to them about the future in order harm the person.

One additional background aspect deserves noting. In intertestamental Judaism a tendency arose to attribute the temptation to sin not to God but to the Devil. This trend surfaces in the Old Testament in the later writings reflecting Israelite thinking toward the end of the OT era.⁹ But it flourishes in the period subsequent to the OT era. This was when the concept of a devil as the expression of evil and all that opposes God took on clearly defined shape and form among the Jews. Here James positions himself distinctly from that viewpoint.

Thus in light of both the Greek background and some streams of Jewish thinking in the ancient world, it is easy to understand how in the minds of some a temptation to sin could be linked up to God. But James firmly positions himself in that segment of Jewish thought which adamantly denied any such link was possible.

One additional side note is important here. Modern commentators argue extensively over the connection of vv. 2-12 and 13-18, and in particular the connection between πειρασμόν (v. 12) and πειραζόμενος (v. 13). By the switch from the noun to the verb in these two adjacent verses, what did James signal? Testing or trial is clearly the meaning of the noun. And the verb is usually taken to mean 'tempt' to do wrong. Often the meanings are naively adopted and the two passages are then interpreted as though they possess little connection to one another. But the vocabulary and the thought development of James here will not allow us to so casually treat the two passages. A πειρασμός and the experience of πειραζόμενος have a close intimate connection to one another. Don't forget that James is speaking pragmatically here, not theoretically. Every moment of difficulty and hardship in life always carries with it the option of inappropriate reaction to God. We can seek God's help in such moments or we can lash out at God in criticism and rebellion. James' point -- in my estimation -- is that when this aspect of the hardship hits us we must not ever try to blame God for the urge to rebel and thus criticize Him for this urge. In no possible way imaginable is God behind the urge to sin as our response to hardships in life. And to attempt to pin on Him the responsibility for sinful reaction to hardships is to reflect fundamental ignorance of who God is. And who we are, as well.

Literary:

Understanding the literary aspects is important, mostly in terms of the context and the internal arrangement of idea expression.

Genre: The literary aspects of the text do not exhibit distinctive genre traits beyond a general paraenesis expression of moral admonition. One distinctively Jewish thought pattern emerges in the logic of verses seventeen and eighteen. James argues his point of assurance that only good gifts come from God by using the so-called 'light to heavy' or 'heavy to light' pattern of reasoning. Jewish scribes of this era often sought to establish their point by alluding the more difficult thing, being accomplished in the past, signaling the certainty of the much less difficult thing being possible in the present. James applies this in verse eighteen by reminding his Jewish Christian readers that God had already done the hugely difficult thing in their life -- birthing them into His family -- and thus He certainly was fully capable to granting lesser blessings to them now and in the future. The reality of their conversion was evidence of God's complete capability of granting good things in their life now. They had already received the hugely 'good gift' from God, their salvation; now when God granted things to them they could expect those lesser gifts to have the same character and nature.

Context: Implicit in some of the discussion above are signals of the proper context of 1:13-18. This is illustrated below in the structural outline of the book of James.

STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT

Of James¹⁰

⁹"In the OT God is responsible for testing (Gn. 22:1; Dt. 8:2; Ps. 26:2), but in later Judaism there is a tendency to refer this to another source, especially the devil. (Gn. 22:1 is restated in terms similar to Job in Jub. 17-19; a similar reinterpretation went on in 2 Sa. 24:1 and 1 Ch. 21:1. 1QM 16-17 presents Satan as the active agent in the test.)" [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 81.]

¹⁰Taken 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

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
The Word and Piety	25-37	1.19-27
Faith and Partiality	38-55	2.1-13
Faith and Works	56-72	2.14-26
Controlling the Tongue	73-93	3.1-12
True and False Wisdom	94-102	3.13-18
Solving Divisions	103-133	4.1-10
Criticism	134-140	4.11-12
Leaving God Out	141-146	4.13-17
Danger in Wealth	147-161	5.1-6
Persevering under Trial	162-171	5.7-11
Swearing	172-174	5.12
Reaching Out to God	175-193	5.13-18
Reclaiming the Wayward	194	5.19-20

Although many commentators struggle with proper understanding of the contextual setting of the passage, it appears reasonably clear when correctly grasped. Unquestionably the noun *πειρασμός* (trial) and the experience of *πειραζόμενος* (being tempted) establish a close link between vv. 2-12 and vv. 13-18. The mystery is the tendency of some commentators arbitrarily detach verse 12 from what precedes it and attach it to what follows. This makes no sense at all and sets up a typically superficial understanding of verse twelve.

The nature of this connection between vv. 2-12 and vv. 13-18 is relatively simple: Verses 13-18, and especially vv. 13-16, touch on one aspect of every *πειρασμός*, the inclination to lash out at God in blaming Him for my sinful response to trials, and especially from my urge to rebel against Him for the *πειρασμός*.

On the other side of the passage, absolutely no connection of vv. 13-18 with vv. 19-27 exists. This reflects the randomness of the paraenesis gathered up from James' preaching and incorporated into this written document. It also reflects a tendency toward randomness that typifies most paraenesis in the ancient world whether written in Aramaic, Greek, or Latin. In modern illustration of this, James uses a 'shot gun' approach rather than a 'rifle' approach in presenting his ideas.

The injection of a brand new topic is signaled several ways in verse nineteen. The use of the Ionic Greek spelling ἴστε, 'know this,' for οἴδατε dramatically shifts gears. In fact this caused some questions by a few copyists who tended to replace ἴστε with ὥστε in order to minimize the shift in directions. Again this reflects the later Greek mind-set with little grasping of Jewish paraenesis in written expression. Also in James the use of the vocative case ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί, *my beloved brothers*, -- or one of the variations of it -- most often surfaces as an introduction to a new topic.¹¹ Conceptually the theme of vv. 19-27 bears little connection -- none formally and minimal informally -- to vv. 13-18.

Structure:

The block diagram of the scripture text below in English represents a very literalistic English expression of the original language Greek text in order to preserve as far a possible the grammar structure of the Greek expression, rather than the grammar of the English translation which will always differ from the Greek at cer-

¹¹"The vocative (ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί) in James is generally associated with an imperative (ἀδελφοί appears 15 times: 9 times it follows an imperative; twice it precedes one; once it introduces a clause leading to an imperative; twice it is in a question; and only once, in 3:10, does it come in a declarative sentence)." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 91.]

tain points.

- ^{1.13} when being tempted
- 16 Let no one say,**
"I am tempted by God";
for
- 17 God is incapable of being tempted by evil**
and
- 18 He does not tempt anyone.**
- ^{1.14} Rather
- 19 each person is tempted**
by his own passion
when he is lured and enticed;
- ^{1.15} then
- when conceived
- 20 passion gives birth to sin,**
and
when fully matured
- 21 sin produces death.**
- 22** ^{1.16} **Don't be led astray,**
my dear brothers.
- ^{1.17} **All good giving**
and
- 23 every perfect gift is from above**
coming down
from the Father of lights
with whom there is no variation
or
shadow
cast by turning.
- ^{1.18} Of his own accord
- 24 He gave us birth**
by the Word of Truth
so that we might be a certain first-fruit of His creation.

The first part (vv. 13-16; #s 16-22) of 1:13-18 deals with the origin of temptation and reflects perspectives that were common in the Judaism of the first Christian century. A repeated pattern is used by James to make his points. First, that no one can blame God for an enticement to sin (# 16). This is then supported by two reasons (#s 17-18). Second, the true origin of temptation lies with our own passions (#. 19). This is elaborated on with serious warnings of the deadly consequences of human passions (#s 20-21). A climatic conclusion is reached with the admonition in v. 16 (#22).

The second part (vv. 17-18) affirms in strong language the complete goodness and graciousness of God as he relates to humanity, especially his own people. In statement 23, James asserts that only good things come down from God. We can know this is true out of our own experience of receiving good things from God (# 24). Commonly used patterns of ancient Jewish scribal argumentation are reflected in this section. The common link between the two segments is the emphasis upon God. First, from a denial that He is involved in anything negatively oriented toward us, then positively from the standpoint of His actions toward us.

One significant interpretative issue structurally in the passage is the role of verse 16 (statement 22 in the above block diagram). Some commentators see it connected to what precedes as a climactic statement, while others see it as introducing what follows. Which ever view that is adopted will basically determine the precise meaning of the admonition against being deceived -- over either the nature of temptation, or the nature of God. Very likely the intention is to imply both segments with a warning about the nature of temptation

and the affirmation about the nature of God.

Exegesis of the Text.

The above diagram of the text reflects a two part division of this text into smaller units. Verses 13-15 clearly disavow any connection of God to the impulse to evil coming out of a trial while verses 17-18 affirm emphatically that only good things consistently come from the hand of God. Verse 16 is the paper clip holding these two sections together by bring the preceding emphasis to a climatic admonition. But it also sets up what follows in verses 17-18 with the same warning to avoid being deceived. Don't allow yourself to be misled either about where sin comes from nor what consistently comes from God.

Our exegesis of the passage will revolve around these two basic divisions with verse sixteen attached to the first section:

1) Sin does not come from God, vv. 13-16.

13 μηδεὶς πειραζόμενος λεγέτω ὅτι Ἀπὸ θεοῦ πειράζομαι· ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἀπειραστός ἐστιν κακῶν, πειράζει δὲ αὐτὸς οὐδένα. 14 ἕκαστος δὲ πειράζεται ὑπὸ τῆς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας ἐξελκόμενος καὶ δελεαζόμενος· 15 εἴπα ἡ ἐπιθυμία συλλαβοῦσα τίκτει ἁμαρτίαν, ἡ δὲ ἁμαρτία ἀποτελεσθεῖσα ἀποκύει θάνατον. 16 μὴ πλανᾶσθε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί.

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

Already treated above is the issue of the logical connection between vv. 13-16 and vv. 2-12. In the later the emphasis on experiencing real hardships in life was treated. Now in vv. 13-16 James shifts to the aspect of those hardships that entice us to reject God and God's ways when under pressure. He uses ancient diatribe to do this.¹²

The core expression is μηδεὶς πειραζόμενος λεγέτω..., *let no one being tempted say...* James denies permission to anyone inclined to speak out against God in the midst of being tempted. Although we talk much about temptation, and mostly as seduction to evil, the Bible does not spend a lot of time discussing this topic, and also approaches it more from temptation being a test than as seduction.¹³ The group of English words

¹²“The interlocutor makes his position clear. In direct speech the text places in his mouth the words ‘I am being tempted by God’ (Ἀπὸ θεοῦ πειράζομαι), which is the literal rendering. Other examples of *oratio recta*, which is a device in James’ homiletical or debating style, are 2:3, 16, 18; 4:13.” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 34.]

¹³“The biblical idea of temptation is not primarily of seduction, as in modern usage, but of making trial of a person, or putting him to the test; which may be done for the benevolent purpose of proving or improving his quality, as well as with the malicious aim of showing up his weaknesses or trapping him into wrong action. ‘Tempt’ in AV means ‘test’ in this unrestricted sense, in accordance with older English usage. It is only since the 17th century that the word’s connotation has been limited to testing with evil intent.

“The Heb. noun is *massâ* (EVV ‘temptation’); the Heb. verbs are *māsâ* (EVV usually ‘tempt’) and *bāḥan* (EVV usually prove or try: a metaphor from metal refining). The LXX and NT use as equivalents the noun *peirasmos* and the verbs (*ek*)*peirazō* and *dokimazō*, the latter corresponding in meaning to *bāḥan*.

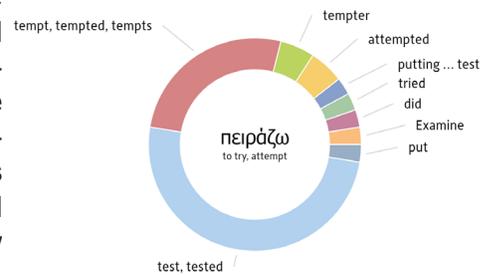
“The idea of testing a person appears in various connections throughout the Bible.

“1. Men test their fellow human beings, as one tests armour (1 Ki. 10:1; cf. 1 Sa. 17:39; *māsâ* both times), to explore and measure their capacities. The Gospels tell of Jewish opponents, with resentful scepticism, ‘testing’ Christ (‘trying him out’, we might say) to see if they could make him prove, or try to prove, his Messiahship to them on their terms (Mk. 8:11); to see if his doctrine was defective or unorthodox (Lk. 10:25); and to see if they could trap him into self-incriminating assertions (Mk. 12:15).

“2. Men should test themselves before the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:28: *dokimazō*), and at other times too (2 Cor. 13:5: *peirazō*), lest they become presumptuous and deluded about their spiritual state. The Christian needs to test his ‘work’ (i.e. what he is making of his life), lest he go astray and forfeit his reward (Gal. 6:4). Sober self-knowledge, arising from disciplined self-scrutiny, is a basic element in biblical piety.

“3. Men test God by behaviour which constitutes in effect a defiant challenge to him to prove the truth of his words and the goodness and justice of his ways (Ex. 17:2; Nu. 14:22; Pss. 78:18, 41, 56; 95:9; 106:14; Mal. 3:15; Acts 5:9; 15:10). The place-name Massah was a permanent memorial of one such temptation (Ex. 17:7; Dt. 6:16). Thus to goad God betrays extreme irreverence, and God himself forbids it (Dt. 6:16; cf. Mt. 4:7; 1 Cor. 10:9ff.). In all distresses God’s people should wait on him in quiet patience, confident that in due time he will meet their need according to his promise (cf. Pss. 27:7–14; 37:7; 40; 130:5ff.; La. 3:25ff.; Phil. 4:19).

that are related to the idea of temptation do not reach back beyond the thirteenth century in origin.¹⁴ The religious emphasis on being tempted to sin received a huge boost with the Reformer Martin Luther, and consequently has been a major emphasis in Protestant theology since the 1500s. Thus in modern times the idea of tempting has centered on seduction or enticement to do wrong, while previously the main focus was on testing or examining, a meaning largely stemming from both the Old and New Testament emphases.¹⁵ Generally the ancient Israelites saw the testing of Abraham's faith, climaxed in Gen. 22:1-19, as the foundational experience for every follower of God. The story of the fall in Gen. 3:1-19 stands in the background although the vocabulary of tempting is not present in the biblical text. Interestingly, in the Hebrew texts of Job the words for tempt are not present in the text but have surfaced in the Septuagintal translation with the *πειράζω* word group in 7:1; 10:17; 16:9; 19:12; 25:3. Tempting in the sense of testing is clearly the thrust of



“4. God tests his people by putting them in situations which reveal the quality of their faith and devotion, so that all can see what is in their hearts (Gn. 22:1; Ex. 16:4; 20:20; Dt. 8:2, 16; 13:3; Jdg. 2:22; 2 Ch. 32:31). By thus making trial of them, he purifies them, as metal is purified in the refiner's crucible (Ps. 66:10; Is. 48:10; Zc. 13:9; 1 Pet. 1:6f.; cf. Ps. 119:67, 71); he strengthens their patience and matures their Christian character (Jas. 1:2ff., 12; cf. 1 Pet. 5:10); and he leads them into an enlarged assurance of his love for them (cf. Gn. 22:15ff.; Rom. 5:3ff.). Through faithfulness in times of trial men become *dokimoi*, ‘approved’, in God's sight (Jas. 1:12; 1 Cor. 11:19).

“5. Satan tests God's people by manipulating circumstances, within the limits that God allows him (cf. Jb. 1:12; 2:6; 1 Cor. 10:13), in an attempt to make them desert God's will. The NT knows him as ‘the tempter’ (*ho peirazōn*, Mt. 4:3; 1 Thes. 3:5), the implacable foe of both God and men (1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12). Christians must constantly be watchful (Mk. 14:38; Gal. 6:1; 2 Cor. 2:11) and active (Eph. 6:10ff.; Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9) against the devil, for he is always at work trying to make them fall; whether by crushing them under the weight of hardship or pain (Jb. 1:11–2:7; 1 Pet. 5:9; Rev. 2:10; cf. 3:10; Heb. 2:18), or by urging them to a wrong fulfilment of natural desires (Mt. 4:3f.; 1 Cor. 7:5), or by making them complacent, careless and self-assertive (Gal. 6:1; Eph. 4:27), or by misrepresenting God to them and engendering false ideas of his truth and his will (Gn. 3:1-5; cf. 2 Cor. 11:3; Mt. 4:5ff.; 2 Cor. 11:14; Eph. 6:11). Mt. 4:5f. shows that Satan can even quote (and misapply) Scripture for this purpose. But God promises that a way of deliverance will always be open when he allows Satan to tempt Christians (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2 Cor. 12:7–10).

“The NT philosophy of temptation is reached by combining these last two lines of thought. ‘Trials’ (Lk. 22:28; Acts 20:19; Jas. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:6; 2 Pet. 2:9) are the work of both God and the devil. They are testing situations in which the servant of God faces new possibilities of both good and evil, and is exposed to various inducements to prefer the latter. From this standpoint, temptations are Satan's work; but Satan is God's tool as well as his foe (cf. Jb. 1:11f.; 2:5f.), and it is ultimately God himself who leads his servants into temptation (Mt. 4:1; 6:13), permitting Satan to try to seduce them for beneficent purposes of his own. However, though temptations do not overtake men apart from God's will, the actual prompting to do wrong is not of God, nor does it express his command (Jas. 1:12f.). The desire which impels to sin is not God's, but one's own, and it is fatal to yield to it (Jas. 1:14ff.). Christ taught his disciples to ask God not to expose them to temptation (Mt. 6:13), and to watch and pray, lest they should ‘enter into’ temptation (i.e. yield to its pressure) when at any time God saw fit to try them by it (Mt. 26:41).

“Temptation is not sin, for Christ was tempted as we are, yet remained sinless (Heb. 4:15; cf. Mt. 4:1ff.; Lk. 22:28). Temptation becomes sin only when and as the suggestion of evil is accepted and yielded to.”

[D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1162.]

¹⁴“**Tempt** [Middle English, from Old French *tempter*, *tenter*, from Latin *temptare*, *tentare* to feel, try] (13th century)

“**temptation** \tem(p)-'tā-shən\ noun (13th century)

“**tempter** \tem(p)-tər\ noun (14th century)

“**tempting** adjective (1596)

“**temptress** \tem(p)-trəs\ noun (1594)”

[*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1996).]

¹⁵“Alongside the purely secular use, however, there is a distinctly religious understanding of the concept. The Hebrew term *נסו* *pi*, which the LXX renders by *πειράζω*, very frequently has a religious tinge, and it passes this on to the Greek equivalent. Hence *πειράζω* (also *πειρασμός* etc.) takes on a wider range of signification, and it is used much more often than in profane Greek, since the idea of testing is an essential one in the Bible. The God of the OT is in the first instance the God who makes demands, requiring man's fear, faith and confidence. But man, as may be seen from Gn. 3:1–19, is tempted to seek to be as God. In so doing he rebels against God's commandment, transgresses it, and thus becomes guilty. From the time of the fall his obedience to God is subject to constant threat through trial, whether it be that God tests and proves him or that the adversary (Satan) is at work.⁹ On the other hand, *πειράζω* can also be used when man tempts God.” [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 6:24.]

this document, and is in the same tradition of the testing of Abraham and of the nation Israel. The emphasis on God's testing of individuals is especially prominent in the Wisdom literature, both inside and outside the Old Testament.¹⁶ God's intent is to give us through a test the opportunity to demonstrate a genuine commitment to Him. He has no desire to lead us to do evil.

The claim ἀπὸ θεοῦ πειράζομαι, **from God I am being tempted**, placed in the mouth of the 'straw man' reflects a tendency of some Jews to carry the idea of God's testing of the person a step further to then blame God for any failure of that test which led to sinful actions.

That this is the angle which James is coming from, rather than the Job / Garden of Eden seduction to sin by Satan,¹⁷ is very clear from the context of this statement of James. James thus cautions his Jewish Christian readers to resist this tendency to try to escape responsibility for one's own actions by blaming God for them.

This stream of Jewish emphasis makes it easier for us understand what James seeks to accomplish by linking both the discussion of trials (vv. 2-12) and that of temptation (vv. 13-18) so close together. God does permit us to experience trials in this life, but in those trials He never seeks to lead us into sinful conduct.

This is asserted by James in two ways with the causal γὰρ clause in verse 13b.¹⁸ First, ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἀπειράστος¹⁹ ἐστὶν κακῶν, **for God is untemptable to do evil**. And then second, πειράζει δὲ αὐτὸς οὐδένα, **and**



¹⁶“In the Wisdom lit, of the OT there are many refs. to testing.¹⁶ In Sir. 2:1 we find the admonition: τέκνον, εἰ προσέρχῃ δουλεύειν κυρίῳ, ἐτοίμασον τὴν ψυχὴν σου εἰς πειρασμόν. Sir. 33:1 has the assurance: τῷ φοβουμένῳ κύριον οὐκ ἀπαντήσῃ κακόν, ἀλλ’ ἐν πειρασμῷ καὶ πάλιν ἐξελεῖται. These two examples show that there has been a sharp change in the understanding of the concept of testing. Though the sayings are so general that one cannot say for certain what is implied in πειρασμός, there can be no doubt that the term approximates closely to the predominantly Gk. concept of education, → V, 596–625.¹⁷ God educates His elect, cf. Wis. 3:5 f.: (δίκαιοι) ... ὀλίγα παιδευθέντες μεγάλα εὐεργετηθήσονται, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἐπέειρασεν αὐτοὺς καὶ εὗρεν αὐτοὺς ἀξίους ἑαυτοῦ· ὡς χρυσὸν ἐν χωνευτηρίῳ ἐδοκίμασεν αὐτούς. Cf. 11:9 and Sir. 34:9 f.¹⁸ But the idea of testing is in this way robbed of the seriousness it has elsewhere in the OT, for there is no longer any real danger of failing the test and resisting God. Only in this light can one understand the petition in ψ 25:2:¹⁹ δοκίμασόν με, κύριε, καὶ πείρασόν με, πύρρῳ τῶν νεφρῶν μου. Finally, any misfortune or suffering which smites the righteous is in the Wisdom lit. regarded as educative. This may be seen in Wis. 3:5 and esp. in Sir. 4:17, where it is said (of σοφία): καὶ βασανίσει αὐτὸν ἐν παιδείᾳ αὐτῆς ... καὶ πειράσει αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς δικαίωμασιν αὐτῆς, → I, 561–563. Thus the whole life of the righteous is a test, since God educates His own throughout their lives. The righteous Abraham is an example; it is said of him in Sir. 44:20: ἐν πειρασμῷ εὐρέθη πιστός, cf. 1 Macc. 2:52. He is again an example in Jdt. 8:25 f.: (κύριος) ... ὃς πειράζει ἡμᾶς καθὰ καὶ τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν. μνήσθητε ὅσα ἐποίησεν μετὰ Ἀβραάμ, καὶ ὅσα ἐπέειρασεν τὸν Ἰσαακ ...²⁰ One should model oneself on Abraham and others in order to pass the test or overcome temptation.” [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 6:26.]

¹⁷“In later Judaism there is a tendency to refer this to another source, especially the devil. (Gn. 22:1 is restated in terms similar to Job in Jub. 17–19; a similar reinterpretation went on in 2 Sa. 24:1 and 1 Ch. 21:1. 1QM 16–17 presents Satan as the active agent in the test.) The Christian tradition also pictures God as the tester in the Greek form of the Lord’s Prayer, μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν (this refers to the eschatological test rather than daily temptations; cf. Jeremias, *Prayers*; Lohmeyer; Schürmann; Manson). Either this petition or the Jewish tradition would give ample ground for one to blame God for his failure in the test. It is not necessary to posit a nascent gnosticism with its evil creator-god (contra Adamson, 69). Jeremias, *Prayers*, 104, argues that James is making a direct reference to the Lord’s Prayer. But it is not necessary to posit this either. If he is, it would be to the Greek form, for the Aramaic form could be understood to say ‘cause that we do not enter into the test’; cf. Carmignac, 289.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 81.]

¹⁸“The introductory γὰρ lets the reader know that these are indeed reasons, while the δὲ joining the two indicates that they are different reasons, not tautological. Yet the translation of the first phrase is as various as the commentators. Ruling out the tautological possibility, which accepts an active sense for ἀπειράστος and appears in the Vg and some older commentators (‘God does not tempt to evil’ — Deus enim intentator malorum est), one is left with three types of possibilities: (1) ‘God cannot be solicited to evil’ (e.g. Laws, 71; Mussner, 87; Dibelius, 121–122), (2) ‘God is inexperienced in evil’ (Hort, 23), or (3) ‘God ought not to be tested by evil persons’ (Spitta, 33–34). All of these are grammatically permissible, for they accept a not unusual passive sense for a -τος verbal adjective (cf. MHT I, 221–222).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 82.]

¹⁹“ἀπειράστος can be construed here only as a pass. verbal adj., v. Bl.-Debr. §182, 3, also Wnd. Kath. Br. and Dib. Jk., ad loc., Page 10 of James Study

He does not tempt anyone.

That God cannot be moved to commit sinful actions should be self-evident. From the psychological angle, sin appeals to something missing in one's life, e.g., Satan's appeal in Gen. 3. If absolutely nothing is missing, then there is no appeal possible. Such is the case with God who is holy and complete in every way. The single use of the adjective ἀπειραστός only here in the entire New Testament creates some of the uncertainty with what James is talking about. Clearly the Bible indicates that individuals on occasion try God's patience, and thus tempt Him to intense reaction. But James' point here seems to be that nothing that we do can move God to do something wrong. He is just that perfect!

And if this is so with His character and nature, then the second reason logically follows: πειράζει δὲ αὐτὸς οὐδένα, and **He Himself tempts no one**.²⁰ This seems on the surface to contradict other statements of scripture that assert that God does test individuals.²¹ The simplest explanation is that although God does allow tests, i.e., hardships (cf. 1:2), in no way does He seek to get us to sin in response to those hardships. Commentators tend to make this far more complex than it actually is, and thus many of their responses are very convoluted and almost impossible to understand.

Thus in this first segment, v. 13, James asserts emphatically that in no way can we blame God for our sinful actions, since He has absolutely nothing to do with sin and an enticement to it.²²

with other instances. Cf. also Agr., 21: ἀνὴρ ἀδόκιμος ἀπειραστός. Korn, 32, n. 2 suggests that there has been some intrusion of Gk. thought into the saying of Jm." [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-).]

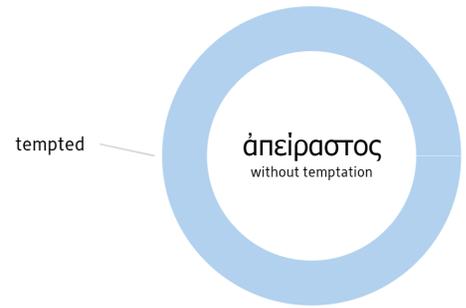
²⁰"The last phrase in the verse, πειράζει δὲ αὐτὸς οὐδένα, carries us forward to a different place in Jewish tradition. While he does not say that testing is evil or that God is not involved somewhere in the testing process, James does assert that God is not directly responsible. The reader expects the reason to be that God allows Satan to test people, which would be in line with how 1 Chronicles reinterprets 2 Samuel and how Jub. 17–19 reinterprets Genesis 22. But while James believes in some demonic involvement (as will appear in 3:15 and 4:7), he does not want to introduce it here. God does not test you, he argues; rather, you test yourself!" [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 83.]

²¹"Patristic readers of James were more alert to the problems posed by his assertion 'God does not tempt anyone,' possibly because they shared more deeply and unequivocally in the worldview shaped by the Scriptures than did later commentators. It was not James' teaching on faith and works that appeared most problematic to them, but this passage. So while it could be used straightforwardly as a proof that God tests for good rather than evil (Dionysius of Alexandria, *Commentarium in Lucam XXII*, 46 [PG 10:1596]), it also demanded explication as a 'contradiction in Scripture,' not only with OT passages, but with such NT passages as the Lord's Prayer. Some of this discussion is indicated in the Introduction III. B. In general, commentators like Oecumenius and Bede distinguished between tempting to evil, which they attributed to the devil (see also the *Catena* and the *scholia*), and the 'testing for virtue' that can be attributed to God. As the *scholia* puts it: 'God by testing does not provide the opportunity for evil, but through patience, the opportunity for a crown.'

"Once the point has been raised by the interlocutor, James' argument takes on a more diatribal character. The first response is by way of aphorism: God is neither tested by evils nor himself tests anyone (1:13). The clarity and decisiveness of this statement deserve attention. Part of it simply removes God from the realm of evil: God has nothing to do with it. But the other part also removes God from the 'testing game' entirely. And here is where the conceptual difficulty appears. Does James suggest, then, that God is not the source of all that is? Are the 'various testings' that the readers encounter (1:2) within God's control, or not? If they are, then it must be God who 'tests'; if they are not, then God does not control the universe. Or, do they come from some cosmic forces (such as demons) who are fighting God for control? None of the options is entirely satisfactory. The patristic resolution, furthermore, that God does not 'tempt' to evil but does 'test' for virtue, may not truly solve the problem, but at least it has the virtue of taking the problem (and the text) seriously."

[Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 203-04.]

²²"One passage in the NT expressly forbids us to call God the author of temptation, Jm. 1:13 is directed against Christians who are in danger of taking temptations too lightly, and who even seem to be disposed to make God responsible for their sins.³³ James opposes this view. In so doing he makes a statement about the nature of God which we do not find elsewhere in the Bible, namely, that He cannot be tempted to do evil³⁴ and that He Himself does not tempt anyone, i.e., lead anyone into sin. Jm. makes the point even more plainly in v. 14. The author of temptation, and hence also of sin, is one's own ἐπιθυμία, the evil impulse which is in every man, → III, 171, 22–24. Where this comes from, he does not, of course, say." [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed.



If the impulse to sin doesn't come from God, then where does it originate? James' answer is found in the second segment in vv. 14-15. It is summarized simply as ὑπὸ τῆς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας, *by his own passions*.²³ Elsewhere it is clear that James does not rule out the demonic in human experience,²⁴ but that is not his point here. Instead, the problem is within the life of each individual and his/her desires. The noun ἐπιθυμία can suggest positive desires, but usually it references negative desires.²⁵ Not only does James designate ἐπιθυμία as the source of our impulse to sin, he does so in dramatic manner by personifying it with the ὑπὸ direct personal agency construct. It raises its ugly head and asserts itself in a manner of taking control of the individual. Further, the manner of its presentation is labeled ἐξελακόμενος καὶ δελεαζόμενος, *being lured and enticed by it*. These images come from fishing and hunting in the ancient world.²⁶ At the heart of both word

Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 6:29.]

²³“The function of this statement—which is not a repetition of what was said earlier but carries forward the author’s thought—is to assert that God is not directly responsible for the sending of temptation. Perhaps James is making allowance for the origin of evil to be demonic (as in 3:15; 4:7), but there is no explicit reference to any other source than within the person tempted (so v 14).” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 35.]

²⁴Cf. δαμονιώδης (3:15) and ἀντίστητε δὲ τῷ διαβόλῳ (4:7)

²⁵ἐπιθυμία, ας, ἥ (s. ἐπιθυμέω; Pre-Socr., Hdt.+)

1. a great desire for someth., *desire, longing, craving*

a. as a neutral term, in Hdt., Pla., Thu. et al. αἱ περὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ἐ. desires for other things Mk 4:19. ἐ. πράξεων πολλῶν desire for much business Hm 6, 2, 5 (but mng. 2 below is also poss.). ἐ. τῆς ψυχῆς desire of the soul **Rv 18:14**.

b. of desire for good things (Diod S 11, 36, 5 ἐπιθ. τῆς ἐλευθερίας=for freedom; Pr 10:24 ἐ. δικαίον δεκτὴ; ἄνερ ἐπιθυμιῶν GrBar 1:3; Jos., C. Ap. 1, 111) ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχειν εἰς τι have a longing for someth. **Phil 1:23** (ἐ. ἔχειν as Jos., C. Ap. 1, 255; ἐ. εἰς as Thu. 4, 81, 2). ἐπιθυμία ἐπιθυμεῖν (Gen 31:30) eagerly desire **Lk 22:15** (s. on ἐπιθυμέω); ἐν πολλῇ ἐ. w. great longing **1 Th 2:17**. ἐλπίζει μου ἡ ψυχὴ τῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ μου μὴ παραλελοιπέναι τι I hope that, in accordance with my desire, nothing has been omitted B 17:1. ἡ ἐ. καὶ ἡ ἀγρυπνία 21:7. ε. ἀγαθὴν καὶ σεμνήν Hm 12, 1, 1.

2. a desire for someth. forbidden or simply inordinate, *craving, lust* (as early as Plato, Phd. 83b ἡ τοῦ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλοσόφου ψυχῆ οὕτως ἀπέχεται τ. ἡδονῶν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν κτλ.; Polystrat. p. 30; Duris [III B.C.]: 76 Fgm. 15 Jac.; then above all, the Stoics [EZeller, Philos. d. Griechen III/14, 1909, 235ff], e.g. Epict. 2, 16, 45; 2, 18, 8f; 3, 9, 21 al.; Maximus Tyr. 24, 4a μέγιστον ἀνθρώπων κακὸν ἐπιθυμία; Herm. Wr. 1, 23; 12, 4, also in Stob. p. 444, 10 Sc.; Wsd 4:12; Sir 23:5; 4 Macc 1:22; 3:2 al.; ApocMos 19 ἐ. ... κεφαλὴ πάσης ἁμαρτίας; Philo, Spec. Leg. 4, 93, Leg. All. 2, 8, Vi. Cont. 74; Jos., Bell. 7, 261, Ant. 4, 143) **Ro 7:7f; Js 1:14f; 2 Pt 1:4**. ἐ. πονηρά (X., Mem. 1, 2, 64; Ar. 8, 4) Hv 1, 2, 4; 3, 7, 3; 3, 8, 4; m 8:5. ἐ. κακὴ (Pla., Leg. 9, 854a; Pr 12:12; 21:26; Just., A I, 10, 6) Col 3:5.—Of sexual desire (as early as Alcaeus [acc. to Plut., Mor. 525ab]; lead tablet fr. Hadrumetum 7 in Dssm., B 28 [BS 273ff] and IDefixWünsch no. 5 p. 23; PGM 17a, 9; 21; Sus Theod. 8; 11; 14 al., LXX 32; Jos., Ant. 4, 130; 132; Ath. 33, 1 μέτρον ἐπιθυμίας ἢ παιδοποιία; Did., Gen. 151, 27 ἄλογος ἐ.) D 3:3. πάθος ἐπιθυμίας **1 Th 4:5**. κατ' ἐπιθυμίαν (cp. Epict. 3, 15, 7; M. Ant. 2, 10, 1; 2; 3; Just., A II, 5, 4; Ath. 21, 1) in accordance with physical desire alone IPol 5:2. πρὸς ἐπιθυμίαν τ. ἀνθρώπων Ox 840, 38 (Ps.-Pla., Eryx. 21, 401e πρὸς τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ σώματος=to satisfy the desires of the body; cp. 405e: gambling, drunkenness and gluttony are called ἐπιθυμίαι.—In Ox 840, 38, since the ν in ἐπιθυμίαν is missing and restored, the word might also be ἐπιθυμίας). ἐ. γυναικός (Da 11:37) Hm 6, 2, 5; 12, 2, 1. Pl. (oft. LXX; EpArist 256; Philo) w. παθήματα **Gal 5:24**. In a list of vices (cp. Philo, Congr. Erud. Grat. 172, Migr. Abr. 60, Vi. Cont. 2) 1 Pt 4:3; D 5:1. ἐ. πολλὰ ἀνόητοι many foolish desires **1 Ti 6:9**; νεωτερικὰ ἐ. youthful desires **2 Ti 2:22** (WMetzger, TZ 33, '77, 129–36); κατὰ τὰς ἰδίας ἐ. in accordance w. their own desires **4:3**; cp. πρὸς τὰς ἰ. ἐ. Pol. 7:1; κατὰ τὰς ἐ. αὐτῶν AcPl Ha 8, 20 (for this: ἀνομίας AcPl BMM recto, 26, restored after Ox 1602, 27). αἱ πρότερον ἐν τῇ ἀγνοίᾳ ἐ. the desires that ruled over you formerly, when you were ignorant **1 Pt 1:14**.—W. gen.: subjective gen. ἐ. ἀνθρώπων **1 Pt 4:2**; τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν **J 8:44**; gen. of quality ἐ. μiasμοῦ defiling passion **2 Pt 2:10**; cp. μιαρὰς ἐ. 1 Cl 28:1; βδελυκτὰς ἐ. 30:1. ἐ. τῆς ἀπάτης deceptive desires **Eph 4:22**. τῶν ἐ. τῶν ματαίων 2 Cl 19:2; cp. Hm 11, 8. ἐ. τῶν ἀσεβειῶν Jd 18. ἐ. τῆς πονηρίας evil desire Hv 1, 1, 8. ἐ. τῆς ἀσελγείας 3, 7, 2; the gen. can also indicate the origin and seat of the desire ἐ. τῶν καρδιῶν of the hearts (Sir 5:2) **Ro 1:24**. τῆς καρδίας ... τῆς πονηρᾶς 1 Cl 3:4. ἐ. τοῦ θνητοῦ σώματος **Ro 6:12** (Ps.-Pla., Eryx. 21, 401e, s. above; Sextus 448 ἐπιθυμίαι τοῦ σώματος). τῆς σαρκός **Eph 2:3; 1J 2:16; 2 Pt 2:18**; B 10, 9. τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν **1J 2:16**; to denote someth. to which desire belongs gener. vs. **17**; σαρκικὰ ἐ. (Hippol., Ref. 5, 9, 22; Did., Gen. 62, 3) 1 Pt 2:11; D 1:4; σωματικὰ ἐ. (4 Macc 1:32) *ibid.*; κοσμικὰ ἐ. worldly desires **Tit 2:12**; 2 Cl 17:3; ἐ. τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ Pol 5:3; εἰς ἐ. to arouse desires **Ro 13:14**; ποιεῖν τὰς ἐ. act in accordance w. the desires **J 8:44**. τελεῖν ἐ. σαρκός gratify the cravings of the flesh **Gal 5:16**; ὑπακούειν ταῖς ἐ. obey the desires **Ro 6:12**; δουλεύειν ἐ. be a slave to the desires **Tit 3:3**; cp. δοῦλος ἐπιθυμίας IPol 4:3. ἄγεσθαι ἐπιθυμίαις be led about by desires **2 Ti 3:6**. πορεύεσθαι κατὰ τὰς ἐ. **Jd 16; 18; 2 Pt 3:3**; ἐν ἐπιθυμίαις (Sir 5:2) **1 Pt 4:3**; ταῖς ἐ. τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου Hs 6, 2, 3; 6, 3, 3; 7:2; 8, 11, 3. ἀναστρέφειν ἐν ταῖς ἐ. **Eph 2:3**.—BEaston, Pastoral Ep. '47, 186f; RAC II 62–78. S. πόθος.—Schmidt, Syn. III 591–601. M-M. TW. Sv.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 372.]

²⁶“Desire is personified as a force that draws out a victim by luring him, ‘as fish are lured’ (Mayor, 54, citing evidence in Page 12 of James Study

pictures is the idea of deception. Just like the serpent did to Eve in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 3), our passions convince us that something is good and desirable when in reality it is destructive and a spiritual disaster. Some possibility exists here, but is not clear, that James may draw somewhat off the rabbinic doctrine of the 'evil impulse' that was taught in Judaism.²⁷ At minimal, James will not let us avoid personal responsibility for our sin by blaming it on someone else.

When we yield to the impulse to sin, we unleash a Pandora's box of evil into our lives as James describes in v. 15: εἶτα ἡ ἐπιθυμία συλλαβοῦσα τίκτει ἁμαρτίαν, ἡ δὲ ἁμαρτία ἀποτελεσθεῖσα ἀποκύει θάνατον, then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. His "biography" of passion is built around the images of conception and birth. Desire after having reached full term in pregnancy (συλλαβοῦσα) births (τίκτει) sin. And sin when it has run full course (ἀποτελεσθεῖσα) gives birth (ἀποκύει) to death. Thus desire leads to sin and sin leads to death. This is stated as an universal basic spiritual principle that believers should be aware of. Thus the speculation of whether the security of the believer is rejected or not in this statement is irrelevant. James is talking about foundational spiritual truth, not the Calvinistic / Armenian debate over the security of the believer in Christ. Thus the death mentioned here as the ultimate outcome of sinning is all inclusive and the opposite of spiritual aliveness. Sin kills spiritual life whenever sin is given the opportunity. And we give it opportunity by our deceptive passions for evil.

Thus James comes to warn his readers against deception in verse 16: Μὴ πλανᾶσθε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί. The admonition suggests that his Jewish Christian audience both in Jerusalem and in the Diaspora were potential targets of seriously flawed thinking about personal responsibility for their sinful conduct. The popular thinking was that in hardships one could blame God for everything, including the impulse to sin and thus avoid personal accountability for one's own actions. But James won't let his readers do that! God holds each individual personally and directly accountable for his actions, and especially in response to experiencing hardships.

In a day such as ours when willingness to own up to one's own actions is at a very low point, this word from James is greatly needed. In no way can we blame God for what we do. And James will not let us play Flip Wilson with his famous line, "The devil made me do it!" We have been given the option of choosing to obey or to disobey God, but we have not been exempted from accountability for our choices. And this particularly applies to the facing of hardships which test our faith commitment to God.

2) **Only good things come from God, vv. 17-18.**

17 Πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον ἄνωθέν ἐστιν, 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.

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.

In the second section of our passage James returns to his focus on God and God's actions in relation to our lives. If God does not send evil into our lives, what does He send? James' answer is simple: πᾶσα δόσις

Xenophon, Cyr. 8.1.32; Mem. 3.11.18) and 'baited' (δέλεαρ is bait [cf. 2 Pet 2:14, 18]: so BGD, 174, which regards δελεάζειν as a technical term for fishing). So the sense is: 'drawn out and enticed by his own desire.' Epictetus, Frag. 112, connects this imagery to the moral temptations of pleasure (ἡδονή; cf. 4:1), and similarly in Philo, Prob. 159: πρὸς ἐπιθυμίας ἐλαύνεται ἢ ὕφ' ἡδονῆς δελεάζεται, 'driven by passion or enticed by pleasure.' The closest parallel to the power of ἐπιθυμία here is the control exercised by σὰρξ (flesh) in the Pauline writings (see Jewett, Paul's Anthropological Terms, 114–16, for the two chief dimensions of σὰρξ, personal and demonic)." [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 36.]

²⁷"Echoes of the temptation in Gen 3 are to be detected at a subsurface level in this verse. The most likely source of the teaching, however, is the rabbinic doctrine of the 'evil impulse' that goads men and women into sin (see earlier). The point of emphasis here is to fasten moral responsibility on the individual. Given the context and James' chief interest, it is less likely that Spitta is correct in proposing that Satan is here regarded as the father of sin (T. Benj. 7:1) or the prime mover of the evil spirits that (in T. Reub. 3) are said to impregnate the sense; or even that the rabbinic interpretations of Gen 6:2–4 which connect a kingdom of demons with human evil are in view (1 Enoch 15:8–10; 16:1; 19:1; 69:4–6; Jub. 4:14–22). James' main purpose is to trace the genealogy of sin no further than to the person tempted by ἐπιθυμία (Mayor, 55). Paul's views are both similar (Rom 7) and distinctive in their details of the demonological setting they draw upon (Martin, *Reconciliation*, 51–59)." [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 36.]

ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον, every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift.²⁸ The hexameter created here is both poetic and instructive with its all inclusive emphasis.²⁹ Likely quoted and modified from another source, the construction stresses every positive action and action content experienced in life.³⁰ Everything good thus ἄνωθεν ἔστιν καταβαῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights. The language of ἄνωθεν clearly signals God as the source, but He is further specified as τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων, the Father of lights. One should remember that the Jewish Weltanschauung (world view) of this era understood the sun, stars, and moon as windows in the canopy called the sky covering the world exposing the brilliance of God to the world. Also, in that space between earth and the canopy of the sky also existed the base of operations for the devil and his demons who launch attacks on people below from the intermediate space between where people are and where God is. Thus God, as the Father of the lights, stands both above the sun, moon, and stars as Creator and Sustainer.³¹ But God stands distinct from these entities and must not be confused with them, as did the Babylonian astrology tradition.

Thus God stands in consistency while these 'lights' are continually changing: παρ' ᾧ οὐκ ἔνι παραλλαγή ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Particularly to Palestinian Jews the image of the sun offering morning light and warmth and then burning down in severe mid-day heat especially in the summer time would have had special meaning. God does not change the nature of His actions toward us, in contrast to these lights. The second segment ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα, shadow due to change, with its obscurity has occasioned different copying patterns reflecting differing understandings of its meaning. The general sense of the inconsistency of the lights in contrast to the consistency of God is clear, but the terminology employed by James raises uncertainty about the specifics.³² The shadow especially of the sun and the

²⁸James' declaration in 1:17 is rightly perceived as one of the noblest theologoumena in the NT. Patristic writers recognized its extraordinarily rich and foundational quality. They use it in discussions of God's nature and attributes but also in discussions of human transformation (John Chrysostom, *In Psalmum CXVIII*, 33 (PG 55:683). It was such a favored text through the entire Eastern tradition that one is not surprised to find that in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom as it is celebrated to this day, James 1:17 is the last citation from Scripture heard by the worshipers before leaving the liturgical assembly." [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 204-05.]

²⁹That πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον makes an hexameter, the second syllable of δόσις being lengthened under the ictus, may be an accident, although even so it might show a good ear for rhythm on the part of the writer. But the unusual and poetical word δῶρημα and the imperfect antithesis to vv. 13–15 make it more likely that we have here a quotation from an unknown source." [James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 159.]

³⁰πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον form a hexameter quotation, which was probably originally a pagan proverb (H. Greeven; Amphoux, 127–136, claims the quotation runs until φώτων τοῦ οὐρανοῦ], but he has to alter the text so much that he fails to convince; Ropes, 159, gives a good demonstration of the poetic form). In that case the saying originally meant 'every gift is good and every present perfect' (roughly equivalent to 'don't look a gift horse in the mouth'), but James has altered it by adding the awkward ἄνωθεν ἔστιν, making it 'every good gift and every perfect present is from above' and bringing it in line with much Jewish and Hellenistic thought (cf. Philo Sacr. 63; Migr. Abr. 73; Post. C. 80; Plato Rep. 2.379)." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 86.]

³¹The circumlocution 'father of lights' refers to God as the creator of the stars (Gn. 1:14–18; Ps. 136:7; Je. 4:23; 31:35; Sir. 43:1–12; the sun and moon were probably considered the greatest of the stars); whether or not James thought of the stars as animate beings is not clear, but may be supposed from the general Jewish belief (Jb. 38:7; 1QS 3:20; Eth. Enoch 18:12–16; cf. G. Moore I, 403; Schlatter, 133). In any Jewish mind the imagery of light and stars would associate with God and the good (H. Conzelmann, TDNT IX, 319–327; Amphoux, 131–132, suggests the classical poetic φῶς = ἀνὴρ and thus 'father of men' as a possibility, but the astronomical terms following would rule this interpretation out). The phrase 'father of lights,' found elsewhere only in some versions of the Ass. Mos. 36, 38, is probably built from the creation narrative and the fact that God was thought of as light (1 Jn. 1:5; Philo Som. 1.75) by analogy to many similar statements about God (Jb. 38:18; Test. Abr. 7:6; Philo Spec. Leg. 1.96; Ebr. 81; CD 5:17–18). The idea is certainly Jewish both because of the creation reference and because Hellenistic thought apparently did not use φῶς to designate heavenly bodies." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 87.]

³²The final phrase of the verse both fits the metaphor developed in 'father of lights' and makes the argument coherent: if God gives good and does not change, he cannot be trying to trap people into evil (not all Jews would have agreed: some believed God gave evil gifts as well; Gn. Rab. 51:3). While this sense is clear enough, the exact meaning of the words has caused endless difficulty. The use of παρά to express an attribute is not common, but is known (Rom. 2:11; 9:14; Eph. 6:9); ἔνι is not problematic (= ἔνεστιν; cf. 1 Cor. 6:5; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; BDF §98); παραλλαγή, τροπή, and ἀποσκίασμα form the real problems. All of these

moon signal constant change in contrast to God.

A further signaling of God as the Giver of nothing but good is given in verse eighteen: βουληθεῖς ἀπεκύησεν ἡμᾶς λόγῳ ἀληθείας εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἀπαρχὴν τινα τῶν αὐτοῦ κτισμάτων, *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.* By the use of the heavy / light pattern of argument, James reminds his readers that God has already done the ‘heavy’ thing in granting new birth, and thus can be trusted to do the ‘light’ things of good gifts now. God’s action grows out of His free choice, not out of compulsion or obligation.³³ What God chose to do was to ‘birth’ us by the Word of truth.³⁴ The ‘us’ (ἡμᾶς) are believers in Christ, not just Jews. The means of this birthing is λόγῳ ἀληθείας, *the Word of truth.* James here alludes to the Gospel message of salvation.³⁵ The objective of this birthing of believers is stated as εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἀπαρχὴν τινα τῶν αὐτοῦ κτισμάτων, *so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.* Although some variation in possible meaning exists, the general sense is that believers might be the ‘down payment’ of the divine plan of redemption that will ultimately include all of creation.³⁶

words could be used to refer to astronomical phenomena, but none of them (with the exception of τροπή in certain limited contexts) is a technical term. Thus confusion results when one tries to determine to which astral phenomena James refers. This confusion is reflected in a textual uncertainty: whether to read τροπῆς (most manuscripts) or τροπή (614 and a few other minuscules) or ῥοπή (some versions) or ἀποσκίασμα (κ^c A C K and most witnesses) or ἀποσκίασματος (κ^{*} B p23). Of these readings, only ἡ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα makes any sense unless one is prepared to emend the text (Metzger, 679–680; Dibelius, 102; Ropes, 162–164; cf. Schlatter, 133–134, who emends the text to read ἡ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασματος, which still makes little sense; Dibelius suggests [ἡ] τροπῆς ἢ ἀποσκίασματος as a counsel of despair; and Adamson, 96–97, tries τροπῆς ἢ ἀποσκίασμα· αὐτὸς ...), but commentators have searched in vain to find to what phenomena it refers: (a) shadow of the changing constellations (G. Fitzler, TDNT VII, 399); (b) shadow of an eclipse (Cantinat, 94), or (c) shadow of night (Mussner, 92; Spitta, 43–45). Perhaps all of these are looking for too specific a referent. The father of lights is God. God neither changes (παράλλαξις) nor is changed (darkened by a shadow from change). The terms suggest a general reference to astronomical phenomena, particularly to the sun and moon (for Mussner, 91, is surely right in noticing the creation reference, and the sun and moon alone are called lights in Gn. 1:18), which were well known for changing (Sir. 17:31; 27:11; Epict. 1.14.4, 10; Wis. 7:29; Eth. Enoch 41, 72; Test. Job 33), while God was unchanging (Philo Deus Imm.22; Leg. All. 2.33; Jb. 25:5). They thus serve as a general illustration in accord with the imagery, while the only specific referent is God.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 87–88.]

³³“The author leads off by pointing out that God wanted to do something for people: ‘in accordance with his will’ (Dibelius, 103) or ‘wanting us’ (Reicke, 64, implies this possibility, but carries it one step further to ‘with good will’; contra Reicke, the idea that God willed is not at all out of keeping with the context; Adamson’s conjecture, 75–76, is also improbable). In the light of the general overlap in use between θέλω and βούλομαι, one must not stress the choice of vocabulary (James uses βούλομαι 3 times and θέλω twice, using θέλω for God’s choice in 4:15 and both words for human volition, 4:4; 2:20; cf. G. Schrenk, TDNT I, 632–633, and Elliott-Binns, “James I. 18”). Nor should the emphatic position of the participle be stressed, except to note that this is the normal position for the participle in Philo when referring to the creative decree of God (Op. Mund. 16.44.77; Plant. 14; cf. Mussner, 93). James’s point is not simply that God chose, but what he chose to do.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 88.]

³⁴“That God chose ‘to bring us forth’ is the center of endless debate. Ἀπεκύησεν is properly applied only to a female (as *yālad* in the qal in Hebrew), but this does not warrant the conclusion of Edsman or Schammlberger, 59, that the passage must therefore refer to the gnostic idea of a male-female primordial God. First, as Dibelius, 104, shows, Edsman’s patristic citations fail to show that ἀποκυεῖν cannot be used metaphorically (see especially Iren. Haer. 1.15.1). Second, multiple streams of Jewish tradition refer to God bearing his people or the world (Dt. 32:18a LXX — θεὸν τὸν γεννήσαντά σε; Pss. 22:9; 90:2; Nu. 11:12; 1QH 9:35–36; Philo Ebr. 30; Tanhuma on Ex. 4:12; cf. also the female imagery applied to God in Is. 66:13; Od. Sol. 8:16; 19:3), so this imagery is far from unparalleled. Third, birth or new birth theology is attested in all forms of Christian tradition, whether in Paul (Eph. 1:5; Rom 12:2; 1 Cor. 4:15; Tit. 3:5), Peter (1 Pet. 1:3, 23), or John (Jn. 1:13; 3:3–8; Jn 1 3:9; 4:10). Fourth, the choice of ἀποκυεῖν rather than γεννάω (which would have been the more usual term) was dictated by a need to parallel 1:15. Sin produces death, but God produces life, the quality of this life being specified by the context (cf. G. Bauer, DNTT I, 187, who shows even τίκτω can be used metaphorically, though it is less suitable than ἀποκυεῖν; cf. also A. Ringwald, DNTT I, 176–180).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 88–89.]

³⁵“The syntax suggests that this ‘word’ is the instrument through which God brings people to life. All four of the other occurrences of the phrase in the NT refer to the gospel as the agent of salvation (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15). And this reference to ‘word’ must also be seen in relation to the other important uses of the same term (Gk. logos) in this context (vv. 21, 22, 23). The ‘implanted word’ of v. 21 is sometimes thought to be a consciousness of God resident by nature in every human being. Yet this word, James says, can ‘save your souls’: indication, again, that the gospel is in view.” [Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2000), 79–80.]

³⁶“God’s grace has been extended through the gospel to people so as to bring into existence a foretaste, or down payment

The image of ἀπαρχή comes out of the Jewish festival of Pentecost where the grain offering collected from the first ripening stalks of wheat or barley in late spring time were dedicated to God and then became God's promise of a full harvest to come. Believers across the ages signal the divine intention of a larger harvest, and that, at the end, all of creation will be purged of its sinfulness.³⁷ Here κτισμάτων, *creatures*, equals καινὴ κτίσις, *new creation*, in Paul as found in 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Eph 2:10; 4:24.

Therefore James ends this segment with imagery of believers as an encouraging witness to the lost world that God is moving toward harvest day and that they can participate in it through faith in Christ as well. This gave special meaning to Jewish Christian readers as the new, special people of God, fulfilling a role as witnesses to the rest of the world which the Jewish people failed to do.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

The application of this text is again clear and it applies to believers today in a similar manner as it did to the first Jewish Christian readers. Although our modern western culture seldom seeks to blame God for sinful conduct by people, a great tendency to blame the devil for it does exist. In both James' situation and in ours, the motivation is identical: to avoid personal accountability for our sinful actions, and especially those coming out of facing hardships. James will not let us ignore our responsibility for our own sins.

Additionally, our world is plagued by distorted images of God. James' picture of God in vv. 13-18 is critically important for us to understand. God does not in any way permit us to engage in sinful conduct, especially in the facing of hardships. He certainly does not encourage sin on our part. And even more importantly the image of God consistently pouring out nothing but good gifts to His children is greatly needed in our day. Many people have a hugely twisted understanding of God that James can correct. How do we know that only good gifts come from God? James reminds us that the greatest of all divine gifts, the gift of the new birth, has already come to us not only changing us but given us the mission of being witnesses to the rest of God's creation. The greatest gift possible from God is already ours; we can certainly trust Him to grant lesser gifts of good things coming into our lives.

1. What is your picture of God? Especially while facing the hardships of life?
2. Do you accept full responsibility for your own sinful actions? Or, do you try to blame God (or the devil) for them?
3. How aware are you of the good gifts coming down from God into your life?
4. Have you experienced the new birth as the greatest possible gift of God in your life?
5. Do you acknowledge your divine mission to be a 'first fruit' witness to others?

('firstfruits'), of a redemptive plan that will eventually encompass all of creation." [Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2000), 80.]

³⁷We should not read universalism into this statement of James here, since in 2:12-13 and 5:1-6 James clearly asserts final judgment and doom for those outside of Christ.