

### III. The Truth About Temptation

October 7/9/10, 2019

James 1:12-18

OT: Pr. 9:13-18; Mal. 3:6

NT: Mt. 6:9-13

**Aim:** To accept responsibility for succumbing to temptation and to look to the good gifts of God, especially our salvation, in resisting it.

#### A. The Vocabulary of Temptation (James 1:12-13)

##### 1. The Nature of Transition (1:12)

<sup>12</sup>*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

*Moo:* Verse 12 is the hinge between vv. 2-11 and vv. 13-18. Older commentators (and most English versions), noting the shift in subject that occurs between vv. 11 and 12 and the introduction in v. 12 of the ‘test’/‘tempt’ language that dominates the next several verses, attach the verse to vv. 13-15. But the trend in recent years is to attach v. 12 to vv. 2-11. This trend reflects the current literary approach to the Bible, with its interest in the various devices that ancient authors used to organize their material. One of these devices, *inclusio*, uses common words or ideas at both the beginning and ending of a discrete section of material. As the verbal resemblances...reveal, vv. 2-4 and v. 12 appear to form just such an *inclusio*. But v. 12 has obvious connections with vv. 13-15 as well.

*Morgan:* Some scholars suggest that 1:12 essentially summarizes 1:1-11 and should be considered with that section. But others maintain that it introduces the topic of temptation. In a sense, both could be right. James has a tendency to employ sentences as bridges from one thought to the next.

*Dorani:* James rounds off the first section in 1:12 by declaring again that testing can bless us... Yet verse 12 also starts a new section by offering a deeper account of trials and growth.... Sadly, trials do not always produce maturity. When facing trials, some doubt God’s goodness and turn away from Him. Instead of growing deeper in faith and love, so that they long for the crown of life, they blame God for their troubles. James corrects this error in 1:13-15.

##### 2. The Nature of Translation (1:12-13)

<sup>13</sup>*Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*

*Morgan:* *Peirasmos* (the noun form of the verb translated ‘tempted’) has the basic meaning of trying, testing, or proving. The word itself is neutral. In 1:2-4, it doubtless carries the idea of being tested by a trial, problem, or difficulty. In 1:13, it clearly refers to temptation, the inducement to evil (see also Mt. 6:13; 26:41; 2 Pe. 2:9). However, biblical commentators differ over its precise connotation in 1:12. It could refer to tests or temptations, but most scholars conclude that it should be understood simply as tests. Regardless, 1:12-13 demonstrate the interconnectedness of tests and temptation. After all, the primary difference is not the test itself, but the person’s response to it... If we are not careful, the testings on the outside may become temptations on the inside.... Since outside trials frequently provide an occasion for the

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enticement of sinful attitudes within, it seems, like a natural transition for James to blend them into his thoughts concerning temptation.

*MacArthur:* *Peirasmos* (the noun form of the verb translated *tempted*) has the basic meaning of trying, testing, assaying, or proving and can have negative or positive connotations, depending on the context. In 1:12, the word is used in the sense of trials, or testings. But in the present text (vv. 13-14), the idea is clearly that of temptation or solicitation to evil. James is here dealing with an entirely different concept. The same word (in noun or verb form) is used for both ideas because the primary difference is not in the *peirasmos* itself but in a person's response to it. If a believer responds in faithful obedience to God's Word, he successfully endures a trial; if he succumbs to it in the flesh, doubting God and disobeying, he is tempted to sin. Right response leads to spiritual endurance, righteousness, wisdom, and other blessings (vv. 2-12). Wrong response leads to sin and death (v. 15).

*Dorani:* In Greek, the same noun *peirasmos* can mean 'a test,' 'a trial,' or 'a temptation,' and the cognate verb *peirazō* can mean 'test,' 'try,' or 'tempt.' The context determines what the author has in mind: a test that lets people prove themselves, or a temptation that leads them to sin. In James 1:12, the word means 'test'; in verse 13, it means 'tempt.' So, if the same event can be a test or a temptation, can the charge be valid? Does God lead people into temptation and sin? No, says James. If a test becomes a temptation, it is sinful human nature that makes it so (vv. 13-14).

*Moo:* The Greek word for 'test' in v. 12, *peirazō*, is the same word that is translated 'tempt' in vv. 13-14. Using this term as a link-word, therefore, James makes the transition from testing to temptation. God, James has said, promises a blessing to those who endure trials. Every trial, every external difficulty, carries with it a temptation, an inner enticement to sin. God may bring, or allow, trials; but he is not, James insists, the author of temptation (v. 13). Enticement to sin comes from our own sinful natures, not from God (vv. 14-15).

### B. The Process of Temptation (James 1:13-15)

#### 1. The Nature of Temptation (1:13a)

<sup>13</sup>Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"...

##### a) When Tempted

...when he is tempted...

*Morgan:* Our text does not say 'if' we are tempted but 'when.' It is a present participle and implies no sense of conditionality – we will face not only trials but temptations as well, enticements to do wrong.... Knowing that it is our fallen human nature to place blame on someone or something other than ourselves, James first addresses the source of temptation negatively in 1:13 before he does so positively in 1:14. *First, it is important to realize that other people are not the source of our temptations.* The tendency to 'pass the buck' is as old as the Fall itself (cp. Gen. 3:9-13).... We have been playing this blame game ever since the Garden. But for James this will not do. *Second, we need to recognize that Satan is not the primary source of temptations.* That is right, you read that sentence correctly. Satan presents temptations, but is not the primary source of it, as James makes clear in 1:14. The devil does not make us do it. *Third, and most importantly, God is not the source of our temptations* (1:13, 16-18).

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*Hughes:* None of Adam’s children like to take the blame for sin and we will do almost anything to escape it—blame others, blame our loved ones, even blame God. Blaming the gods was typical of the pagan mind-set in Biblical times because their gods were capricious, vengeful, soap-opera deities who taunted and tantalized humanity. ... Jewish believers, dispersed in veracious pagan cities by persecution, were not immune to this mind-set. Evidently in their misery certain of their people were saying God was tempting them to fall, that He had lost patience with them and was deliberately bringing them down. This being so, God was to blame for their sin. Putting the blame elsewhere is popular in our culture.

*Doriani:* James knows that a test can be taken two ways. We can view it as a trial and turn to God for aid, so we persevere. Or we can read it as a tragedy, or as a senseless accident, or as a failure—on God’s part—to love and protect us. Worse yet, some who meet trials blame and attack God for them, accusing Him of malice. They say He tests them too severely, pushing them toward sin so they will fall. When they face tests, they do not endure, but give up. Believing failure is inevitable, they do fail, and then seek someone to blame. ‘God is tempting me,’ they say (1:13). ‘He is leading me to ruin.’

*Moo:* His concern...is to help his readers resist the temptation that comes along with the trial. For every trial brings temptation. Financial difficulty can tempt us to question God’s providence in our lives. The death of a love one can tempt us to question God’s love for us. The suffering of the righteous poor and the ease of the wicked rich can tempt us to question God’s justice, or even His existence. Thus, testing almost always include temptation, and temptation is itself a test. ‘Preserving under the trial’ (v. 12) demands that we overcome these kinds of temptations.

### b) *God Does Not Tempt*

<sup>13</sup>Let no one say..., “I am being tempted by God”...

*MacArthur:* ‘Let no one say’ translates a present active imperative form of the verb *legō* (‘Let...say’), coupled with the negative imperative *mēdeis* (‘no man’). The idea is, ‘Let no person say to himself,’ that is, rationalize to himself, that ‘when he is tempted,’ he is ‘being tempted by God.’ The very idea is anathema. ‘By’ translates the preposition *apo*, which is sometimes rendered ‘of’ or ‘from,’ and carries the connotations of remoteness, distance, and indirection. Another preposition (*hupo*), which is often translated with those same English words (by, of, from), denotes direct agency. What James is saying, therefore, is that no one should say that God is even *indirectly* responsible for temptation to evil. He is no way and to no degree responsible, directly or indirectly for our ‘being tempted.’

*Hughes:* The conclusion James comes to in the opening sentence of verse 13 is, ‘Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God.”’ No one can blame God by mouthing uniformed rationalizations about divine ordination or circumstances or disposition.

### c) *God Does Test*

*Hughes:* It is true, of course, that while God does not *tempt* us, He does *test* us in order to prove and improve our character. The refrain from the Lord’s Prayer—‘And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil’ (Mt. 6:13)—means, ‘Don’t allow us to come under the sway of temptation that will overpower us and cause us to sin.’ This is a prayer that Jesus taught and that He certainly answers (cp. 1 Cor. 10:13).

*Moo:* But James is specifically concerned with a particular facet of the biblical worldview that might make such resistance to temptation difficult. The OT often makes clear that God Himself

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brings trials into the lives of His people (e.g., Gen. 22:1; Jdg.2:22; 2 Chr. 32:31; cp. 2 Kgs. 20:12-19). But while God may test or prove His servants in order to strengthen their faith, He never seeks to induce sin and destroy their faith. Thus, despite the fact that the same Greek root (*peira-*) is used for both the outer trial and the inner temptation, it is crucial to distinguish them.

*Dorani:* God does *test* His people of course (cp. Gen. 22:1; Ex. 16:4)... The test of Abraham revealed the strength of his faith, but the test of Israel revealed their lack of faith.

*Morgan:* The Bible does teach that God sometimes tests people. Biblical examples include Abraham in Genesis 22:1; Job; the nation of Israel in Judges 2:22; and King Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 32:31. Yet while God may test or prove His people in order to strengthen their faith and dependence upon Him, He never seeks to induce sin. This important distinction is commonly misunderstood. Those who stress the sovereignty of God in bringing trials into their lives could easily and falsely assume that God likewise brings temptations into their lives. (This would not be all that different from the contemporary theological blunder that if God is sovereign, then He is the author of sin). So James goes to great lengths to refute this error, tackling it in verse 13 and again in verses 16-18. Why is it impossible for God to be the source of our temptations. James' answer centers on the biblical doctrine of God: God is not the source of temptation because He is completely good and holy. We see this in four ways.

### 2. The Nature of Evil (1:13b)

*...for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*

*Morgan:* First, God cannot be tempted to do evil. James uses a rare passive adjective (*apeirastos*) that means 'untemptable.' He is completely holy and without the possibility of sinning. He never solicits us to do evil.... *Second*, God does not tempt anyone. The Greek is forceful: '*He Himself* tempts no one.' Evil repulses Him! He does not tempt anyone. God tests us for our good, but never tempts us so that we might sin. There is a big difference between testing to prove you are genuine and tempting to do evil. God says He never entices anyone to evil. When God tests us He does so to cause us to stretch and grow in our Christ-like character.

*Moo:* James insists that *God cannot be tempted by evil*. This rendering, which is paralleled in most English translations, understands the rare word *apeirastos* as a passive verbal adjective with the meaning, 'unable to be tempted.' ... The traditional interpretation...[has a] probable word play on the word *peirazō*: God does not 'tempt' because he cannot be 'tempted.' ... How does this clause contribute to James's argument? Presumably, it is seen as a preliminary observation leading on to the main point: *He Himself tempts no one*. What must be understood is that the temptation is an impulse to sin, and since God is not susceptible to any such desire for evil, He cannot be seen as desiring that it be brought about in man.

*MacArthur:* 'Cannot be tempted' translates the adjective *apeirastos*, which is used only here in the New Testament and carries the idea of being unttemptable, without the capacity for temptation. It is the same as being invincible to assaults of evil. In other words, the nature of evil makes it inherently foreign to God.... The two are mutually exclusive in the most complete and profound sense. God and evil exist in two distinct realms that never meet. He has no vulnerability to evil and is utterly impregnable to its onslaughts. He is aware of evil but untouched by it, like a sunbeam shining on a dump is untouched by the trash.

*Hughes:* This assertion that God cannot be tempted is stressed by a rare verbal adjective that means that He is 'unable to be tempted'—He is 'unttemptable.' The sense is that God is

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unsusceptible to evil; evil has never had any appeal for Him. It is repugnant and abhorrent to Him. Evil cannot promote even the slightest appealing tug in the heart of God. Because He cannot be tempted to sin, James' conclusion follows: 'He Himself tempts no one' to sin. God has never tempted us to sin because He cannot! It is a moral impossibility. This is extremely important because the human inclination from the Garden of Eden to this day is to consciously, or at least subconsciously, blame God and thus try to palliate our own feelings of guilt.

*Doriani:* James says that this [blame game] is preposterous... God never singles anyone out for impossible tests, tests that are bound to fail. God does not entice men and women to sin. To do so would be evil. Neither is God tempted to do evil, nor does He entice other to evil, for that would be evil, too.

*MacArthur:* In the testing of Jesus in the wilderness after forty days and nights of fasting, the difference between *peirasmos* as testing and as temptation can be seen clearly, the same distinction seen in this first chapter of James (between vv. 2-3, 12 and vv. 13-14). Matthew reports that 'Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil' (Mt. 4:1). But the remainder of the account (vv. 2-11) makes clear that, whereas from Satan's perspective the experience was intended as temptation (inducement to sin), for Jesus the experience was a test, which He passed without the least wavering. Despite Satan's clever use of God's Word, he did not succeed even slightly in penetrating Jesus' impregnability to sin.

### 3. The Nature of Man (1:14)

*Hughes:* James now describes the *source* of temptation in no uncertain words: 'But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.' James well knew that Satan is busy tempting believers to sin (see 4:7), but he also knew that the root of the problem is our own evil. We should never be surprised by this... Romans 5:12 tells us that we all 'sinned' in Adam (aorist tense), which means that we share such solidarity with him that we actually sinned when he sinned. And, of course, we have verified this in our own lives a million times over. But the point is, having sinned in him, we share the same pathology to sin as Adam and Eve who fell to 'the lust of the *flesh*' ('the woman saw that the tree was good for food'), the lust of the *eyes* ('a delight to the eye'), and 'the *pride of life*' ('to be desired to make one wise').

#### a) Inevitability (1:14a)

<sup>14</sup>*But each person is tempted...*

*MacArthur:* A second evidence that God is not responsible for our temptation to sin is our own nature, that fallen spiritual disposition that makes us susceptible to temptation. 'Each one' emphasizes the universality of temptation, from which no person is immune. Every human being 'is tempted'; there are no exceptions. The present tense underscores the continuing, repeated, and inescapable reality of the process, which occurs when a person 'is carried away and enticed by his own lust.'

#### b) Inducement (1:14b)

*...when he is lured and enticed...*

*MacArthur:* 'Carried away' and 'enticed' both translate participles that describe closely related but different aspects of the temptation process. The first term is from the verb *exelkō*, which has the meaning of dragging away, as if compelled by an inner desire. It was often used as a hunting term to refer to a baited trap designed to lure an unsuspecting animal into it. The second term

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(‘enticed’) is from *deleazō*, which was commonly used as a fishing term to refer to bait, whose purpose was also to lure the prey from safety to capture and death.... Animals and fish are successfully lured into traps and hooks because the bait is too attractive for them to resist. It looks good and smells good, appealing strongly to their senses. Their desire for the bait is so intense that it causes them to lose caution and to overlook or ignore the trap or the hook until it is too late.

*Moo*: James uses metaphorical language to convey the mode of operation of the *evil desire*: temptation arises when a person is *dragged away and enticed by his own evil desire*. The metaphor comes from fishing. The bait on the fisherman’s hook would *entice* the fish; and, once hooked, the fish would be *dragged away*. James, who if not a fisherman himself was certainly well acquainted with the profession from his upbringing near the Sea of Galilee, may be thinking of fishing as he uses the words here.

*Morgan*: ‘Enticed’ (*deleazomenos*) is an old Greek word that literally refers to luring and catching by the use of bait or a trap, like baiting a hook. The fish sees the worm covering the hook, swims around and bites it, gets reeled to the shore, is killed, cleaned, and eaten! And all the while, the bait keeps us from seeing the hook! So it is with sin – it never shows us the end result of ‘taking the bait.’

### c) Inner Desire (1:14c)

...by his own desire.

*Morgan*: Temptation begins with our own ‘lust’ or ‘desire.’ The compound Greek word is descriptive: *epithumia*, literally ‘to burn with heat.’ Unfortunately, lust almost always has sexual connotations in our modern culture, but the word here refers to any sinful craving. We all have natural desires (physical, sexual, emotional, etc.) but those desires are also affected by the Fall.

*Moo*: James now attributes temptation to each person’s *evil desire*. No Greek word corresponding to ‘evil’ is found in the text, but the NIV rendering is nevertheless justified. ‘Desire’ (*epithymia*) can have a neutral meaning in the NT (cp. Lk. 22:15; Phil. 1:23), but the context here makes it clear that James uses it with its more typical NT sense: fleshly, illicit desire. The word often carries for us a sexual connotation (and it has this sense in the NT), but it usually has a broader meaning, including any human longing for which God has prohibited (cp. 1 Pe. 2:11; 1 Jn. 2:17).

*MacArthur*: In exactly the same way, we succumb to temptation when our ‘own lust’ draws us toward evil things that are appealing to fleshly desire. Although in contemporary use, ‘lust’ has long been associated almost exclusively with illicit sexual desire, the Greek term *epithumia* that it translates refers to a deep, strong desire or longing of any kind, good or bad.... The preposition that is here rendered ‘by’ is *hupo*, which carries the idea of direct agency. We are not tempted even indirectly ‘by (*apo*) God’ (v. 13), but we *are directly* ‘carried away and enticed by *hupo*) [our] own lust.’ The fault is entirely within us, in our unredeemed flesh.

*Dorani*: In biblical language, ‘desires’ are not intrinsically evil (e.g., Lk. 22:15; 1 Th. 2:17).... Yet if we simply count the uses of the term ‘desire,’ most desires are sinful. This reminds us that our desires easily turn to evil, so that we can readily turn something that is good in itself to evil.

### d) Application

[DSB Note: Unlike Flip Wilson, in his character as Geraldine Jones, we cannot say: ‘The devil made me do it.’ Neither is the fault in our stars; in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, Cassius says in

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Act I, Scene 2: ‘The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings.’]

*Hughes:* James, in using these words, has graphically painted a picture of how we are tempted by our own illicit desires (lusts). When the temptation passes by, we are drawn away from the things that keep us safe. Soon they are far behind us, as we are lured by the bright, delicious temptation, and in a moment we forget who and what we are and throw caution to the wind and bite. So it was for Eve and Adam and Samson and David and Demas and .... . James could not be more explicit—the *source* of temptation is not God, or even the devil, but man’s own sinful heart. Man is drawn away and then lured to the hook by his own lusts. He is accountable, and no one else! If we are in the grip of lust, the fault is ours and ours alone.

*Moo:* James, like other Jewish and Christian authors, wants to place the responsibility for temptation and sin squarely on the shoulders of each human being. Nor should we make anything of James’s omission of Satan as a source of temptation. James refers to Satan elsewhere (4:7). But his purpose here is to highlight individual responsibility for sin.

*MacArthur:* Sin can look attractive and pleasurable, and usually is, at least for a while. Otherwise it would have little power over us.... But there would be no attraction of sin were it not for man’s own sinful lust, which makes evil seem more appealing than righteousness, falsehood more appealing than truth, immorality more appealing than moral purity, the things of the world more appealing than the things of God. We cannot blame Satan, his demons, ungodly people, or the world in general for our own lust. Even more certainly, we cannot blame God. The problem is not a tempter from without, but the traitor within.

### 4. The Natural Course of Temptation (1:15)

<sup>15</sup>*Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

*Hughes:* James turns us from the *source* to the *course* of temptation.

*Morgan:* We all know the dangers of the drug LSD and have heard, perhaps seen, the horrors of what the drug does to a person. LSD is a useful acronym for remembering the process of temptation: lust leads to sin, and sin brings about death. **Lust—Sin—Death:** spiritual LSD.

*Moo:* James shifts metaphors to describe the havoc that *desire* can wreak in the spiritual life. Aided by the fact that the underlying Greek word is feminine James pictures *desire* as *conceiving* and *giving birth* to sin. And sin, once in existence, if it becomes *full-grown*, produces death.

*MacArthur:* A third proof that God is not the source of temptation is seen in the nature of lust. Having identified lust in the nature of man, James then discusses it in practical terms. Here is the heart of his teaching about temptation. Shifting from the metaphors of hunting and fishing, he now uses the process of childbirth to illustrate his point. ‘Lust’ is depicted as a mother conceiving and bearing a child, which is ‘sin’ and whose ultimate destiny is ‘death.’ Through James the Lord here makes clear that sin is not an isolated act or even a series of isolated acts, but rather the result of a specific process, which is succinctly explained.

#### a) Lust (1:15a)

<sup>15</sup>*Then desire...*

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*MacArthur:* We can identify the four basic steps with words that each begin with the letter ‘d.’ The first is *desire*, an alternate translation for ‘lust.’ Before salvation all people are slaves to ‘lust’ (Eph. 2:1-3; 4:17-19; 1 Th. 4:5). As noted above, *epithumia* (‘lust’) is itself morally and spiritually neutral, its rightness or wrongness being determined partly by the object that is desired and partly by how and for what purposes it is desired. It begins primarily as an emotion, a feeling, a longing for something that at first, may be largely sub-conscious. It develops from somewhere deep within us, expressing a want to acquire, achieve, or possess something that we do not have.

*Morgan:* Good desires are easily misused and misunderstood. Eating is good; gluttony is a sin. Sleep is good; laziness is a sin. Work is good, but focusing on work rather than God and your family is sin. How often good things are distorted and corrupted! Lust is when desire starts taking over, and when we act on those wrong desires, sin is the result.

*MacArthur:* The next step is *deception*, which is more closely related to the mind than to the emotions. When we think about a desired object, our minds begin to rationalize a justification for getting it.... We don’t have to tell our minds to rationalize our lusts, because they are already so predisposed by our fallenness.... Simply wanting it justifies the effort to have it. It is at that point, James says, that ‘lust has conceived.’ The ‘life of sin,’ as it were, has started to form and grow.

### b) *Sin (1:15b)*

*...when it has conceived gives birth to sin...*

*MacArthur:* The third step is that of *design*, when plans start to be made to fulfill the emotional desire that we have rationalized and justified with our minds. This stage involves the will, our conscious decision to pursue the lust until it is satisfied. And because the will is involved, this is the stage where the most guilt lies. What has been longed for and rationalized is now consciously pursued as a matter of choice.

*Morgan:* James uses the interesting parallel of human conception: when we choose to obey those lusts ‘conception’ takes place. In the same way that the seed of the father impregnates the egg of the mother and a baby is conceived, so it is when our will is joined with lust. Lust conceives and has a baby: sin.... Sin is ignorance (*agnoema*), failure to observe the laws of God (*anomia*), transgression (*para-basis*), and missing the mark (*hamartia* – the word used here in v. 15). We sin actively and passively – sins of commission and omission. The end result of sin is death.

*MacArthur:* The fourth and final stage is *disobedience*. If we allow the process to continue, the design inevitably produces obedience to God’s law, by which it ‘gives birth to sin.’ That which is desired, rationalized, and willed is actually done, committed, and accomplished. Desire leads to deception, deception to design, and design to disobedience, which is sin. It should go without saying that the earlier in the process we determine to resist, the greater the likelihood we will avoid the sin. Conversely, the longer we delay resisting the more likely the actual sin becomes.... The principle of ‘nipping it in the bud’ has no better application than here. The battle must be fought in the mind, where sin is conceived. The truth of God which activates the conscience, the soul’s warning system, must be heard and not ignored. No one can fight the battle in the mind or imagination except the individual believer.

*Hughes:* This is the familiar language of childbirth. There are two births here. First, evil desire gives birth to sin. And second, sin gives birth to death.

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### c) *Death (1:15c)*

...and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

*Morgan:* The old saying is true: sin takes you farther than you want to go, keeps you longer than you want to stay, and costs more than you want to pay. ... The awful reality of sin [is] when it is ‘full grown.’ The Greek word is *apotelestheisa*, a compound word found only here and in Luke 13:32. It means ‘fully developed, complete in all its parts.’ Death inevitably follows when sin is fully formed, for sin from its beginning carried death within itself. This spiritual and physical death sentence was passed to all of Adam’s progeny. Thus, when we are born, we bear the spiritual nature of Adam – separated from God and dead in our sin (Eph. 2:1-3). Paul stressed this reality in another way in Romans 6:23: ‘The wages of sin is death.’ ... This death sentence is starkly contrasted with the crown of life promised to enduring believers in verse 12.

*Hughes:* This second birth in the course of temptation (‘and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death’) is particularly chilling. The root idea of ‘brings forth’ is ‘ceases to be pregnant,’ emphasizing the inevitability of the process running its course. The idea is that sin grows rapidly, just as an embryo grows to maturity, and when it is full-grown, the state of pregnancy must end. But the horror here is, sin does not give birth to life, as would normally be expected, but to death! There are three mutant generations here: the mother is evil desire, the daughter is sin, and the grand-daughter is death. This death is spiritual and eternal—forever and ever.

*Dorani:* There are two potential paths in any test. Testing met with endurance makes us mature and complete; it leads to life (1:3-4, 12). Or testing met with selfish desire leads to sin and death (1:14-15). ‘Death’ is more than the death of the body, tragic as that is. Rather, just as faith and endurance lead to eternal life (1:12; cp. Mt. 10:22), so selfish desire and sin lead to eternal death (Rev. 20:14-15).

*MacArthur:* If the cycle of temptation is completed, ‘sin is accomplished,’ and ‘it brings forth death.’ ... To use another figure, ‘the wages of sin is death’ (Rom. 6:23). Sin brings forth physical death, separating the soul from the body; spiritual death, separating the soul from God; and eternal death, separating both body and soul from God forever.

*Moo:* The image of ‘desire’ as a seductress luring the believer into an adulterous union that brings death is reminiscent of the role played by the ‘loose woman’ in Proverbs 5-9. This figure, who leads her guests into the depths of Sheol (Pr. 9:18), is contrasted with wisdom, who gives life to those who embrace her (Pr. 8:35). Since James has mentioned wisdom in v. 5, it may be he has this OT imagery in his mind as he contrasts the life given to those who endure trials (v. 12) with the death produced in those who allow desire to run its course (v. 15).

### d) *Application*

*Moo:* James does not tell us how it is that *desire* might conceive and give birth. But he undoubtedly has in mind the active response of a person who is tempted. Temptation, James has said, involves the innate desire toward evil as it is enticed by the superficial attractiveness of sin. James implies that temptation, in and of itself, is not sinful. Only when *desire* ‘conceives’ – is allowed to produce offspring – does sin come into being. The point is an important one, for some extremely sensitive Christians may feel that the fact of their continuing to experience temptation demonstrates that they are out of fellowship with the Lord. To be sure, as one develops more and more of a Christian ‘mind,’ the frequency and power of temptation should grow less. But temptation will be a part of our experience, as it was the experience of the Lord

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Himself (Heb. 2:18), throughout our time on earth. Christian maturity is not indicated by the infrequency of temptation but by the infrequency of succumbing to temptation.

### C. The Remedy for Temptation (James 1:16-18)

*Moo*: Important connections link vv. 16-18 to what precedes: the verb ‘bring forth’ (*apokyō*) (vv. 15 and 18) and the motif of God as a sincere and beneficial giver (vv. 5 and 17). Probably, then, after the transitional v. 16, vv. 17-18 state the positive side of the case that James has made in vv. 13-15. God is not the author of temptation, or of anything evil. He is, rather, one who gives good gifts to His people – and, preeminently, the gift of the new birth.

#### 1. The Nature of Reality (1:16)

<sup>16</sup>*Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.*

[DSB Note: some translations/commentators see v. 16 as finishing the thought of vv. 13-15 regarding desire leading to sin and death; others see it as a transition to introduce the goodness of God in vv. 17-18, in contrast to the evils desires of mankind.]

##### a) Concluding Verses 13-15

*Dorani*: This [death] is the worst possible result of testing, and an idea we might prefer to avoid. Therefore, James commands, ‘Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.’ James warns his readers against blaming temptation and sin on God. He hopes his readers see the truth. Sin begins in our hearts, which are all too willing to follow evil desires. How foolish it is to succumb to temptation, then blame the results on God.

*MacArthur*: In light of these sobering truths, James implores: ‘Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.’ Stop blaming other people, circumstances, or Satan for your temptations and sins, he is saying., Above all, do not blame God. Take full blame on yourselves, where it belongs. Realize that your enemies—your fallenness, your lusts, your weaknesses, your rationalizations, and your sins—are within and have to be dealt with from within.

##### b) Introducing Verses 17-18

*Moo*: The NIV, along with most English versions (the NASB is an exception<sup>0</sup> attach James’ plea *Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers* to the verses that follow. This arrangement is probably justified, since James usually uses the vocative ‘brothers’ to open new sections.... James therefore does not want his readers to make any mistake about what he is about to say about God as the source of all good gifts. But the warning also refers back to the reminder about the source of temptation in vv. 13-15. It therefore serves as a transition between vv. 13-15 and vv. 17-18. Believers, James is saying, must not be led astray into thinking that God Himself is tempting them to evil; on the contrary, He is the invariable giver of good gifts to His children.

*Hughes*: Some of the readers of James’ letter were in...peril. Their miserable flight from Jerusalem and the ongoing persecution as Christians at the hands of fellow Jews had left them not only saying, ‘I am being tempted by God’ (1:13), but mouthing the parallel logic that God is not good. James begins to respond to them in verse 16: ‘Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.’ ... ‘For your soul’s sake, brothers and sisters, stop being deceived!’ This command forms a bridge to James’ defense of the goodness of God.

*Morgan*: James says, ‘Do not be deceived.’ Do not be led down the wrong path. We have a choice which way we will go. Do what you know to be the right thing to do. Sin often makes us

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believe a lie rather than acting on the truth. ‘Deceived’ translates *planasthe* and means ‘to lead astray, to cause one to wander.’ James presents three motivations to help us not be led astray and to resist temptation. *First*, he warns us about the *judgment of God*. Sin leads to death, as shown in verse 15. There is no such thing as sowing a crop of wild oats and reaping a crop of righteous wheat. Death and hell claim their own – always – so do not be deceived.

### 2. The Nature of God (1:17)

*MacArthur*: Finally, James declares that God is not responsible for our temptations to sin because, as he has already made clear (v. 13), His own nature is incompatible with the nature of sin. Because God is wholly righteous and just, by definition He can have no part in sin in any way or to any degree.

#### a) Good (1:17a)

<sup>17</sup>*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above...*

*Morgan*: *Second*, the *goodness of God* motivates us to resist temptation. Contrary to being the source of temptation, God is good and He desires what is best for His children. He is the author of all good gifts. James uses two different words for gift: the first is *dosis*, which usually denotes the act of giving. The second is *dōrēma*, which generally refers to the thing given. James probably does not intend a significant distinction but rather uses the synonyms for rhetorical purposes. All that God gives is good and perfect. The wages we receive from sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life (Rom. 6:23). Not only does God give us salvation, He also graciously provides for us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pe. 1:3).

*Hughes*: The opening phrase...asserts that all goodness comes from God. The sense is even stronger in the literal reading—‘All good giving and every perfect gift is from above’—because it emphasizes that the *action* of giving is good and that all His *gifts* are *telion* (perfect/complete). Thus, God’s giving is intrinsically and comprehensively good—totally good! The logical, implied sense is that nothing evil can possibly come from above. Further, since His gifts are perfect, they, unlike those that come from human hands, manifest their perfection the more they are examined and experienced.

*Moo*: The NIV *every good and perfect gift* abbreviates the Greek text, which, literally translated, has ‘every good giving and every perfect gift.’... [An] explanation for the repetition focuses on the style rather than the content of the words. A popular poetic device among the Greeks was the hexameter, a series of words whose syllables formed six rhythmical sections. The words of the Greek text here form an imperfect hexameter. The repetition of the ‘giving’ idea, then, is necessary in order to create this literary form, and no difference in meaning between the two Greek words should be seen. The same is probably true of the adjectives ‘good’ and ‘perfect,’ although the latter word (Gk. *telios*) touches on a key motif in James and creates something of an *inclusio* with the same word in v. 4.

*Dorani*: When James says, ‘Every good and perfect gift is from above,’ he uses two related terms for ‘gift.’ We could translate the verse, ‘Every good gift and every perfect donation is from above.’ But James emphasizes the *source* of the gifts, not the number.

*MacArthur*: What comes from God is not sin, but only ‘every good thing given and every perfect gift.’ The perfect, flawless, holy goodness of God results in His doing and giving only what reflects His perfect holiness and truth. His works reflect His character. Negatively, James is saying that from temptation to execution, God has absolutely *no responsibility* for sin.

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Positively, he is saying that God has *complete responsibility* for ‘every good thing, and that ‘every perfect gift’ that exists has come down ‘from above.’

b) *Pure (1:17b)*

*...coming down from the Father of lights..*

*Hughes:* Every gift from above is perfect because of the *perfect goodness of God the giver*, who is beautifully described in [v. 1:17bc].

### (1) Source of Physical Light

*MacArthur:* ‘The Father of lights’ was an ancient Jewish title for God, referring to Him as Creator, as the great Giver of light, in the form of the sun, moon, and stars (cp. Gen. 1:14-19).

*Hughes:* This means that God fathered the lights of the universe, giving birth to each of its ten octillion stars in their individual brightnesses, ordering them in their distinctive constellations, and framing the physical laws that keep them on their courses, as well as ordering and sustaining the sun and planets and moons of the solar systems—all of which exist in such perfection that He pronounced them ‘good’ (Gen. 1:18).

*Morgan:* Furthermore, His gifts are *consistently* good. He is the Father of ‘lights.’ Two ideas are expressed about God here. First the construction James used is interesting: ‘lights’ is plural, and it has the definite article (lit., ‘Father of *the* lights’). This indicates that James is referring to those heavenly luminaries that give light to the universe. These good gifts do not come to us by chance or from some impersonal stroke of fate. The Creator God is the supplier of these good gifts.

*Moo:* Father of ...‘heavenly lights’ is a good interpretative paraphrase of the Greek, which simply has ‘lights.’ For the word often refers to the ‘lights’ that appear in the sky: the sun, moon, and stars (see Ps. 136:7-8; Jer. 31:35). While Scripture nowhere else calls God ‘the Father of lights,’ the idea is clear enough. When God is presented as ‘father,’ His creative power is often intended; see, for example, Job 38:28.... James, therefore, cites God’s creation of the heavenly bodies as evidence of His power and continuing care for the world.

*Dorani:* They come down ‘from the Father of lights,’ that is, God the Creator. God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and lights came into being. All lesser lights are subject to change.

### (2) Source of Spiritual Light

*Morgan:* *Third*, He is Light – pure and without shadows. ‘Father of lights’ is a unique designation of God in the Bible.... James’ emphasis here is to show that God operates solely in the realm of light – both physically and morally. Sin and darkness are concepts that go together like a hand in glove. But God is diametrically opposite to this – He is the Creator of all light sources and He is absolute moral and spiritual light. He could never be the Father of sin and darkness.

*Hughes:* Going deeper, God’s being called ‘the Father of lights’ points to His essential nature as light and to His moral goodness.... God’s goodness is at the center of what we see in God’s handiwork (cp. Rom. 1:20).... ‘God is light,’ says John, ‘and in Him is no darkness at all’ (1 Jn. 1:5). There is only goodness in God, and no evil at all.

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### *c) Immutable (1:17c)*

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

*Morgan:* Fourth, He is unchangingly good. In Him there is no ‘variation.’ He does not alternate between good and evil or between light and darkness. He is not moody or capricious; He does not act differently today than He did yesterday. In theological studies this is called the *immutability* of God: He does not change because He is perfect and need not change (Mal. 3:6; 1 Jn. 1:5). God cannot change for the worse because He is holy; He cannot change for the better because He is already perfect.

*Morgan:* The second idea expressed about God in verse 17 is found in the phrase ‘in whom there is no variation or shadow cast by turning.’ This distinguishes God from the luminaries He created. ‘Variation’ is from *parallassō*, found only here in the New Testament and meaning ‘to alternate or cause to vary.’ Even though the heavenly bodies are amazingly stable in their created places, they are still subject to change. Not so with God. He changes not (Mal. 3:6). Quite contrary to being the source of evil in verses 13-16, God, by nature, can only be the author of good gifts.

*Hughes:* Understanding that the term ‘the Father of lights’ proclaims God’s goodness, we are prepared for the stupendous truth of the next phrase.... We earthlings, with our feet planted here on earth, are subjected to constantly changing light. The sun rises, and our shadows fall long to the west; it stands high at noon, brightening all; and as it sets, our shadows are to the east, until they fade to nothingness. Day and night light perpetually change. The moon waxes and wanes to a crescent. Light is reflected and refracted differently moment by moment. But it is not so with the goodness of God. With God ‘there is no variation or shadow due to change.’ God’s goodness is always at high noon.

*MacArthur:* Unlike those sources of light, which, magnificent though they are, can nevertheless vary and will eventually fade, God’s character, power, wisdom, and love have ‘no variation or shifting shadow.’ Through Malachi the Lord declares, ‘I, the Lord, do not change’ (Mal. 3:6); through John, we are told that ‘God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all’ (1 Jn. 1:5); and through the writer of Hebrews we are assured that ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever’ (Heb. 13:8). The celestial bodies God created have various phases of movement and rotation, changing from hour to hour and varying in intensity and shadow. God, however, is changeless.

*Moo:* The Greek words translated ‘variation’ and ‘turning’ often refer to astronomical phenomena in the ancient world, and the earlier reference to God as ‘the Father of lights’ makes it almost certain that this is James’s intention here. ‘Variation’ connotes the orderly and periodic movements of sun moon, planets, and stars. ‘Shadow of turning’ should probably be taken to mean, as NSRV renders, ‘shadow due to change.’ ... This phrase could refer to phases of the moon or to the constant variation of night and day.... James is not writing a scientific treatise but is using general language about the constant motion of the heavenly bodies to make a point about God: He does not change like the heavens do.... James had made a similar point about God earlier in the same section, claiming that God gives to all who ask Him with a single, undivided, intent (v. 5). Indeed, the integrity and undividedness of God – in contrast to the duality and instability of man (cp. vv. 7-8) – is a key motif of the letter as a whole.

*Doriani:* The courses of the sun and the moon change, and the clouds obscure them. But God is light; In Him there is no darkness at all (1 Jn. 1:5). He is the one ‘who does not change like

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shifting shadows.’ There is no variation, no change in His goodness. Therefore, God gives good gifts, not impossible tests. We must view tests as gifts, not traps.

### d) Application

*Hughes:* The good news for today and all eternity is this: God is *infinitely* good. He has never had and will never have more goodness than He has now. He is unchangeably good. He stands like an eternal sun in a cloudless sky radiating unbroken goodness upon us. God will always—*eternally*—be good to us.

*Doriani:* Yet we do succumb to temptations, and they do trap us. We fail to endure, fail to persevere in love for our God. So, do our failures thwart God’s plans? Do our sinful desires lead to hopeless ruin? No, there is hope, in two forms. First, if a genuine believer fails a test, he still loves God, even if imperfectly. God knows of weakness, knows that we are as changeable as He is changeless. Second, if a believer is liable to judgment, James later says, ‘Merch triumphs over judgment’ (2:13).

### 3. The Nature of Redemption (1:18)

*Moo:* James again gives no direct indication of a relationship between the verses. But the logic of the argument suggests that we view birth through the word of truth as an outstanding example of our faithful God’s gifts to His creatures. The imagery of birth, especially following reference to God as ‘Father,’ may refer to God’s creation of human beings.... But James could also be referring to God’s redemptive work rather than His creative work.

*Hughes:* To further drive home the point of God’s goodness, James now takes his readers from the macrocosm of the universe in explaining the divine goodness to the microcosm of their own experience in becoming Christians. God’s goodness is personally experienced.

*MacArthur:* In this verse, James add another piece of evidence (to those in vv. 13-17) that God is not responsible, directly or indirectly, for our temptations, much less our sin—namely, proof from the nature of regeneration itself. The new life that the Lord gives to those who believe in Jesus Christ is godly, holy, Christlike. It is the life of God in the soul of man. By the new birth, a believer is rec-created, given a completely new nature that has no part in sin or evil. Our own lust begets death (v. 15); the gift of God in Christ begets life.

*Morgan:* The *third* motivation that gives us strength over temptation is salvation, that is, a new birth. It is the greatest of all gifts. Notice that James used birth as a picture of desire leading to sin (1:15). Now he uses the same verb (*apokeuō*) to explain how God is the Father of our new birth.... James asserts three truths about this new birth.

#### a) God’s Will (1:18a)

<sup>18</sup>*Of his own will...*

*Morgan:* First, God is the *source* of this new birth. The divine Creator of the heavenly lights is the One who makes us new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).... ‘Of His own will’ translates an aorist participle (*boulētheis*) placed first in the sentence for emphasis. The God who acted freely and without external constraints is the God who graciously took the initiative to give us new birth. Sin brought death (1:15), but God resolutely willed not to let us perish in sin. Having willed it, God acted freely to save us, a fact wholly inconsistent with the notion that God tempts us to sin.

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*Moo:* James stresses the free and unconstrained nature of this giving by beginning the verse with the participle ‘willing’ (*boulētheis*), variously translated ‘in the exercise of His will’ (NASB); ‘in fulfillment of His own purpose’ (NSRC); ‘He chose’ (NIV).

*MacArthur:* Regeneration is the act, and wholly the act, of God, ‘the Father of lights’ (v. 17), accomplished ‘in the exercise of His will.’ Through His sovereign will, God washes away sin, grants forgiveness, and plants new life—a completely new nature within each person who trusts in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.... The phrase ‘in the exercise of His will’ could be rendered most simply as, ‘by His own will.’ But it translates the aorist passive participle of the verb *boulomai*, which expresses the idea of the deliberate and specific exercise of volition, which is suggested by the NASB’s addition of ‘in the exercise of.’ The phrase is also in the emphatic position in the Greek, reinforcing the truth that God’s sovereign and uninfluenced will is the source and basis of the new life.

*Dorani:* God took counsel with Himself and resolved that He would not leave sinners in their plight. He decided to grant them spiritual life by ‘the word of truth.’ This rebirth keeps sin from giving birth to death. It makes God’s children the firstfruits of His creation.

*Hughes:* Just as God acted freely in His goodness when He created the universe. He freely chose to bring the believers to whom James was writing (and us) to Himself (cp. Eph.1:4-5). Everything in salvation was, and is, of God. We are God’s people because of a total act of grace rooted in God’s unprompted goodness.

### *b) God’s Work (1:18b)*

*...he brought us forth...*

*MacArthur:* ‘Brought...forth’ is from the same verb rendered ‘gives birth’ in verse 15. In regeneration, God gives birth to a new spiritual life. Regeneration is a miracle of God by which the principle of new life is implanted in man and the governing disposition of his soul is made. Holy. This is the new birth, being born again (cp. Jn. 3:3-8; Eph. 2:5-6; 1 Pe. 1:23; cp. Ez. 36:25-27).... The new birth is unseen by any human eye but is able to be experience by any human heart that turns to God through faith in Christ. It is evidenced in a transformed life.

*Moo:* The verb ‘give birth to,’ in its only other occurrence in the NT, has been used in v. 14 metaphorically with reference to spiritual birth.... James, therefore, appeals to the ‘new birth’ of Christians as a striking example of God’s good and faithful giving.

*Dorani:* If an unbeliever fails the test, God can use that failure to lead him to Christ. The prophets call this the gift of a new heart (Jer. 31:31-34). Jesus calls it being born from above (Jn. 3:1-8). Paul calls it a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22-24), and regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). James calls it birth through the word. James 1:18 says, ‘He chose to give us birth through the word of truth’ (NIV).

### *c) God’s Word (1:18c)*

*...by the word of truth...*

*Morgan:* *Second*, ‘the Word of truth’ is the *agent* of new birth. This phrase has been variously identified by interpreters as the Old Testament, the gospel, or even Christ Himself.... Men are made His sons when they year and respond to the gospel of salvation, here called the Word of truth as in Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:15.

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*MacArthur:* ‘By the word of truth’ could be rendered literally ‘by the truth’s word,’ that is, by the Word of God, by Scripture. Believers are born again, regenerated, by the power of God’s Word.... In its broadest sense... ‘the word of truth’ (*logo aletheias*) is the whole of God’s Word, and in its more restricted sense it is the gospel (cp. Eph. 1:13; 1 Th. 2:13; Titus 3:5; Eph. 5:25-26).

*Doriani:* God will accomplish this spiritual birth by the ‘word of truth.’ That phrase appears five times in the New Testament—once here, and four times in Paul. Paul’s use of the phrase clearly means ‘the gospel’ (cp. Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5b-6a; 2 Tim. 2:15; contrast 2 Cor. 6:7, where it appears to have another sense)... Clearly God wills our salvation and achieves it through the gospel (cp. also 1 Pe. 1:23; Jn. 1:13; 1 Cor. 4:15).

*Moo:* The most important piece of evidence in favor of a redemptive ‘birth’ here is the phrase ‘the word of truth.’ 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)... We think the phrase ‘word of truth,’ coupled with the allusion to this same word as able to ‘save your souls’ in v. 21, tips the scales in favor of the redemptive interpretation.

*Hughes:* They experienced salvation ‘by the word of truth.’ All of them had had the Word come alive to them, just as we have if we know Christ.

### *d) God’s World (1:18d)*

*...that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

*MacArthur:* Finally, James explains why God regenerates those who place their trust in Jesus Christ. Although salvation is the greatest possible blessing a human can receive, its primary purpose is not to benefit man. But to fulfil God’s sovereign purpose of believers becoming, ‘as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.’ ... The ‘first fruits’ were the first and best of the crops that were harvested and were usually an indicator of what the rest of the crop would look like.

*Doriani:* ‘Firstfruits’ is language from the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. The firstfruits are the first product of field and flock. The Israelites offer them to God (Ex. 23:16-19; 34:19-26; Lev. 2:12; Num. 15:20-21; Dt. 18:4). The New Testament uses the term ‘firstfruits’ metaphorically to describe new life in the Spirit in union with Christ (Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23). But James probably has three Old Testament principles touching firstfruits in mind: 1) All the produce of flock and field come from God. But the firstfruits were especially His. The rest of the food was for daily use, but the firstfruits came to priest and tabernacle. 2) The firstfruits were only the best (Ex. 23:19; 34:26). 3) The firstfruits were an annual confession that God supplied the year’s bounty, that He was faithful to His covenant people yet another year.

*Morgan:* *Third*, the *purpose* of the new birth is that we should be firstfruits of His creatures. What James has in mind here is debatable, as the meaning of ‘firstfruits’ is dependent on the identity of ‘we.’ James may have been referring to his fellow first-generation believers who represented many more to follow. Others think that James has in mind Christians of all ages who are the choices and finest of God’s creation.

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### (1) First-Century Believers

*MacArthur:* When James writes ‘we,’ he is applying the term to the believers of that time, perhaps especially Jewish believers who were the first of the harvest of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They were the first of many more to come in the spiritual harvest God was beginning.

*Hughes:* Finally, the results can only be called good as well—‘that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.’ These Jewish Christians were the first sheaves of a harvest that has been continuing for two thousand years. They were the original, privileged *sample* of what was to come, a *pledge* of the full harvest. God’s unmitigated goodness will ultimately be worked out when all creation will be transformed.

### (2) All Believers

*Dorani:* James says God’s people are His firstfruits. We are the first and the best of His ‘produce.’ He will prove faithful. He will care for us year by year, even as He cared for Israel in the wilderness. This is what the tests should teach us. If we fail, our failure teaches us to turn to God for mercy, as He offers it in the gospel. Then as we persevere with Him in love, come what may, we will receive the crown of life that He has promised.

*MacArthur:* When referring to people, ‘His creatures’ means all who will be saved (cp. Acts 15:14-15). The Greek term is used several times to refer to the material creation, so James may have had that also in mind. In an immeasurably greater way, those who are regenerated through Christ in this present age will be ‘the first fruits among His creatures’ in His ultimate re-creation of the new heaven and new earth after the present heaven and earth have been destroyed (Rev. 21:1; 2 Pe. 3:10).... Believers are the first installment on God’s new creation that is to come (cp. 2 Pe. 3:10-13).

For next time: Read James 1:19-27.