

Notes on the Greek New Testament Day 321 – November 17th – James 1:1-18

Introduction to James

The Author

The author identifies himself simply as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." (1:1). There are two men named James found within the pages of the New Testament who were of sufficient reputation to need no further identification in a letter such as this one. The first was the apostle James, son of Zebedee and brother of John, but he was put to death in about 44 AD, too early to make him a likely author of this letter. The second was James the brother of the Lord mentioned in the Gospels (Matt 13:55; Mk 6:3) who became a follower of Jesus only after the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:7 and John 7:5). He later became the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal 1:19; 2:9,12). Christians have traditionally identified James the brother of the Lord as the author of this letter. G. H. Rendell writes, "Apart from Paul and Peter, no figure in the church of the first days plays a more substantial part upon the historic and legendary stage than James, first Bishop of Jerusalem" (*The Epistle of St. James and Judaic Christianity*).

Though James was personally loyal to the *torah* and sought to maintain ties between the emerging early Christian movement and Judaism, his first loyalty was to Jesus Christ. Early sources suggest that he was stoned to death by the scribes and Pharisees in about 62 AD for refusing to renounce his allegiance to Jesus as the Christ.

The readers

The readers seem to have been Jewish Christians who have left their homes in Palestine and are facing economic distress, including persecution at the hands of wealthy landowners. The situation described in Acts 11:19 may provide a background to this letter.

Moo argues that the letter was probably written *before* James became acquainted with Paul's teaching at the Apostolic Council in AD 48 or 49 (Acts 15). "The historic scenario we suggest is that Paul's preaching in Tarsus from c. 36 (Acts 9:30; Gal 1:21) and in Antioch from c. 45 (Acts 11:25-26) on had been misunderstood by some who heard him. They were apparently using the slogan 'justification by faith alone' as an excuse for neglecting a commitment to discipleship and practical Christian living. It is this 'perverted Paulinism' that James attacks in chap 2. James probably did not even know that Paul's teaching was the jumping-off point for the view he is opposing. He would have attacked such a perversion, of course, at any date. But had he known what Paul truly preached (as he would have after AD 48), he would have put matters differently than he did." The absence of any awareness of the controversy concerning the *torah* that emerged in the early church also suggests an early date for the letter. Moo suggests it was written in the middle 40s, "perhaps just before the Apostolic Council."

The content

Motyer provides a helpful summary of the book, saying, "James sets himself to give practical help to the people of God in the actual situations of their lives. They are not yet gathered to their eternal happiness in Christ, but are scattered in the world (1:1), subjected to many trials and temptations (1:2, 12, etc.), liable to lapse into worldly ways (2:2ff.), or into unspiritual complacency (2:14ff) and in many other ways also buffeted from outside and enticed from within (1:14). They have the great hope of a returning Lord (5:8,9), but He has not yet come, and James would establish Christ's people in a life of practical holiness in readiness for that great day."

James stresses the need for faith to be displayed in obedience and for the life of faith to be characterised by sincere prayer. Moo concludes, "Basic to all that James says in his letter is his concern that his readers stop compromising with worldly values and behaviour and give themselves wholly to the Lord. Spiritual 'wholeness,' then, we suggest, is the central theme of this letter."

Style and Language

Of the style, Johnstone comments that it is "lively and earnest, and an abundance of apt similitudes proves that the writer had in no small degree the eye and imagination of a poet. In several places, especially paragraphs in the last two chapters, both the sentiments and the diction forcibly remind a reader of utterances of the old Hebrew prophets." He continues, "The Greek of James approaches nearer to classical purity than perhaps that of any other New Testament writer. Considering how decided a Hebrew he was in feeling, this is certainly remarkable."

Some have suggested that the quality of the Greek makes it difficult to believe that it was written by a Palestinian Jew. In response, Moo writes, "First, we must not exaggerate the quality of James's Greek. While more polished and closer to the 'higher *koine*' than most NT Greek, the Greek of James is far from literary Greek. Absent are the elaborate sentences found, for instance, in Hebrews." Secondly, Moo refers to more recent research that has shown that "many Palestinians, especially in Galilee and even from poor families, would have grown up with fluency in Greek."

Works frequently referenced in these notes on James

Johnstone, Robert	<i>Lectures on the Epistle of James</i> , Banner of Truth (Reprint of 1871 ed.), Edinburgh, 1977
Martin, R. P.	<i>Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 48: James</i> , Dallas, 1988
Metzger, Bruce M	<i>A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament</i> (Companion Volume to 3 rd Ed. UBS Greek New Testament), United Bible Societies, 1971
Moo, Douglas J	<i>The Letter of James</i> , The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Apollos, Leicester, 2000
Motyer, J Alec	<i>Studies in the Epistle of James</i> , MWE, Croydon, 1968

Verse 1

Ἰάκωβος θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
δοῦλος ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς ταῖς ἐν τῇ
διασπορᾷ χαίρειν.

Ἰάκωβος "Surnamed by Paul as one of the 'pillars' (στῦλοι) of the church, along with Peter and John (Gal 2:9) James enjoyed contact with other leaders (Acts 15:13)." Martin.

θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος
 Martin writes, "Vouga's argument ... in support of taking θεοῦ and κυρίου together is doubly based: (1) other divine titles are linked in 1:27; 3:9 to provide a model for this parallelism; and (2) patristic interpretation of Pseudo-Andrew of Crete (ca. A.D. 740) supports this link. Motyer ... similarly argues for the rendering and cites parallels from the later NT literature. But Mitton criticizes the translation "servant of Jesus Christ, who is God and Lord," while granting the linguistic possibility, on the score that such an explicit ascription of deity to Jesus is rare in the NT and is unlikely in this letter, which he takes to be a primitive document. He does concede, however, that 'even if Jesus is not here identified with God, He and the Father are clearly associated together in what is in effect a unity. One who becomes a servant of Christ thereby becomes a servant of God'."

δουλος, ου m slave, servant

δοῦλος is a title of honour, like the prophets of old who were termed servants of God. Martin comments, "The author blends an old covenant confession of relationship with one under the new, that Jesus Christ is the κύριος (cf. 2:1 and, e.g. Acts 2:36; 1 Cor 12:3; Rom 10:9; Phil 2:11)." Cf. also 1 Cor 8:6.

δωδεκα twelve

φυλη, ης f tribe, people

"By calling his readers 'the twelve tribes,' ... James claims that they constitute the true people of God of the 'last days.'" Moo. Cf. 1 Peter 1:1; 2:9.

διασπορα, ας f dispersion (of the Jews or Christians scattered throughout the Graeco-Roman world)

The picture is that of the people of God living dispersed in the world – not yet gathered to glory. James is writing this letter to tell them how to live in the world. Moo suggests James is writing to Jewish Christians who have been 'dispersed' as a result of persecution (Acts 11:19).

χαίρω rejoice, be glad; imperat used as a greeting

The form here is an 'imperative infinitive' (Moulton, *Grammar* 1:179).

Verses 2-4

By launching directly into the matter of trials, "James suggests that the tough times the believers were facing were a key reason for his writing to them." Moo.

Martin writes, "The subject matter of 'reaction to trials' is the first admonition of the letter, but the theme will be picked up later, notably in chap 5. There the example of Job, a favorite character of the Wisdom school, will be appealed to in support of the thesis that 'affliction produces endurance' (5:11)." There are parallels with Rom 5:3-5 and 1 Pet 1:6-7.

Verse 2

Πᾶσαν χαρὰν ἠγήσασθε, ἀδελφοί μου, ὅταν πειρασμοῖς περιπέσητε ποικίλοις,
 χαρα, ας f joy, gladness, cause of joy

πᾶσαν χαρὰν "here probably suggests intensity (complete and unalloyed joy) rather than exclusivity (nothing but joy)." Moo.

ἠγήσασθε Verb, aor midd dep indic, 2 pl

ἠγεομαι think, regard, consider

ὅταν when, whenever, as often as

πειρασμος, ου m period or process of testing, trial, temptation

περιπέσητε Verb, aor act subj, 2 pl περιπιπτω fall away, encounter (trials)

ποικίλος, η, ον diverse, all kinds of

One of the key trials they were facing appears to have been poverty, but here James deliberately casts his net widely, "including the many kinds of suffering that Christians undergo in this fallen world: sickness, loneliness, bereavement, disappointment." Moo.

Verse 3

γινώσκοντες ὅτι τὸ δοκίμιον ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως κατεργάζεται ὑπομονήν·

γινώσκοντες it is vital that we know and understand the purpose of God in the trials we face. Cf. Rom 5:3-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7.

δοκίμιον, ου n testing, act/means of testing

Found only here and 1 Pet 1:7 in the NT and in the LXX Ps 11:7 (ET 12:6) and Prov 27:21. Some few MSS read the more common adjective δόκιμον.

πιστις, εως f faith, trust, belief

The testing is "not intended to determine whether a person has faith or not; it is intended to purify faith that already exists." Moo.

κατεργάζομαι accomplish, bring about ὑπομονη, ης f patience, endurance

I.e. steadfastness or constancy. It also implies a sense of hope rather than grim determination. "Faith which is tested passes over to steadfastness and consistency of living, and when consistency is pursued it becomes something that is unchangeably fixed and wrought into our character. James is talking about the way of sanctification. He is talking about ... being a consistent Christian through thick and thin. He says, This is the way your faith has got to face the trials of life. It is out of conflict and the trials of life that victory and sanctification are won." Motyer

Verse 4

ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ ἔργον τέλειον ἐχέτω, ἵνα ἦτε τέλειοι καὶ ὁλόκληροι, ἐν μηδενὶ λειπόμενοι.
τελειος, α, ον complete, perfect, mature

A key term for James, cf. 1:17, 25; 3:2.

ἐχέτω Verb, pres act imperat, 3 s ἐχω

There is a play on words here. The REB translates, "Let endurance perfect its work in you so that you may become perfected." By facing trial right through to the end in a spirit of faith and endurance we become mature – fully fashioned into what God would have us be.

ὁλόκληρος, ον sound, whole, complete
μηδεις, μηδεμια, μηδεν no one, nothing
λειπω lack, fall short

"This concern for spiritual integrity and wholeness lies at the heart of James's concern, and he will come back to the matter again and again (see esp. 1:7-8 and 4:4-5)." Moo.

Verses 5-8

"The spiritual perfection that is the goal of trials (vv. 2-4) will be achieved only when divine wisdom is present. And wisdom can be had for the asking – albeit, an asking that is sincere and uncorrupted (vv. 6-8)." Moo.

Verse 5

Εἰ δέ τις ὑμῶν λείπεται σοφίας, αἰτείτω παρὰ τοῦ διδόντος θεοῦ πᾶσιν ἀπλῶς καὶ μὴ ὀνειδίζοντος, καὶ δοθήσεται αὐτῷ·

τις, τὶ acc τινά, τὶ gen τινός dat τινί anyone, anything, a certain

σοφια, ας f wisdom, insight, intelligence

That is, particularly wisdom to know how to act in the face of trials. Martin comments, "Wisdom ... is one of the great terms of practical religion. The question 'Where shall wisdom be found' (Job 28:12) is answered by the sages of Israel in Prov 1:7: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,' implying a devotion to Yahweh and a resolve to walk in the ways of his law. For the Jewish mind wisdom meant practical righteousness in everyday living. And it is God's gift, not a native human disposition."

αἰτεω ask, request

ἀπλως generously

Moo argues that the word signifies singleness of intent rather than generosity. "James is not so much highlighting God's generosity in giving as his single, undivided intent to give us those gifts we need to please him." It stands in contrast to δίψυχος, 'double-minded' in v.8 and "reassures us that God is not in two minds about his giving." Martin.

ὀνειδίζω reproach, insult, abuse

δοθήσεται Verb, fut pass indic, 3 s δίδωμι

An echo of Jesus' words in Matt 7:7a. Calvin comments, "Since we see that the Lord does not so require from us what is above our strength, but that he is ready to help us, provided we ask, let us, therefore, learn whenever he commands anything, to ask of him the power to perform it."

Verse 6

αἰτείτω δὲ ἐν πίστει, μηδὲν διακρινόμενος, ὁ γὰρ διακρινόμενος ἕοικεν κλύδωνι θαλάσσης ἀνεμιζομένῳ καὶ ῥιπιζομένῳ·

"Our asking must coincide with the way in which God gives: he gives with singleness of intent; we must ask with singleness of intent." Moo.

πίστει Noun, dat s πιστις, εως f

μηδεις, μηδεμια, μηδεν no one, nothing
διακρινω judge; midd & aor pass doubt, hesitate

An echo of Jesus' words in Matt 21:21-22.

ἕοικεν Verb, perf act indic, 3 s εἶκα be like

κλύδων, ὠνος m rough water, wave(s)

θαλασσα, ης f sea

ἀνεμιζομαι be driven by wind

ῥιπιζομαι be tossed about

"Here is the sea, says James: now it beats against the rock as though it had no other purpose in mind than to shatter its way through, but now it is driven back. Now one way, now the other. Driven this way and that: divided in its intentions. What a picture of a Christian!" Motyer.

"The *doubter* ... does not pray to God with consistency and sincerity of purpose. Prey to the shifting winds of motive and desire, he wants wisdom from God one day and the wisdom of the world the next." Moo.
Martin comments, "Having stated the clear character of a beneficent and bountiful giver James moves on to stress how appropriate also is the human response in a faith that is wholehearted and loyal. Building on the (mainly) Deuteronomic teaching on Israel's calling to be devoted to Yahweh with a single heart, he exposes the folly of a person with divided affections, likening that person's predicament to that of a storm-tossed boat. That same imagery supplies the punch line of the pericope: the double allegiance that people cherish, hoping to serve God and Mammon (Matt 6:24), leaves them in no better shape than a frail vessel on angry seas; they are tossed about in all their ways."

Verse 7

μη γὰρ οἰέσθω ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος ὅτι
λήμψεται τι παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου

οἰομαι, οἰμαι suppose, think
ἐκεῖνος, η, ο demonstrative adj. that (one)
λήμψεται Verb, fut midd dep indic, 3 s
λαμβάνω

Verse 8

ἀνὴρ διψυχος, ἀκατάστατος ἐν πάσαις ταῖς
ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ.

ἀνὴρ, ἄνδρος m man, husband
διψυχος, ον of divided loyalty, undecided

This is the first time this word is known to occur in Greek literature. It may have been coined by James who uses it again in 4:8. It is the opposite of a 'whole heart' (cf. Ps 119:2; 12:2; Hos 10:2).

"We might well translate, a person who is two-faced with God. We cannot ask God for wisdom if we are being two-faced, if we are trying to look at God and the world at the same time. There has got to be the steady, straight-forward gaze, the determination to go on with God; and then God will give us His wisdom." Motyer

Cf the behaviour of Rehoboam in 1 Kings 12.

ἀκαταστατος, ον unstable

Only here in NT and in Is 54:11 in LXX.

ὁδος, ον f way, path

Verses 9-11

"Poverty can move a person from inflexible loyalty to God simply through the sheer difficulty of living. Wealth can seduce a man's mind from undeviating loyalty to God by putting up the counter-attraction of the things of the world. In these two contrasting circumstances, therefore, we see a sample of the trials of life, and it is James' purpose to show us how the wisdom that God gives enables people to face them and win through." Motyer.

By way of contrast, Martin comments, "The people James wishes to help are those who, by reason of their religious affirmation and affiliation as 'the Lord's poor,' feel themselves socially disadvantaged and slighted. Their trust is in God, and it is James' counsel that in due time God will exalt them. In the meantime let them 'boast' (καυχᾶσθαι, which is closely allied to 'trust' in the OT...) in their ταπεινῶσις ('lowliness,' 'shame') – a sentiment drawn from the idiom of the pious poor who are typified by Hannah (1 Sam 2:1–10) and Mary (Luke 1:52). There is an eschatological flavor to this admonition (cf. 1 Pet 5:5), since the expectation is that God's intervention in their lot will reverse their fortunes – but not necessarily with a consequence that is economically or materially to their advantage. It is in terms of their relationship to God's favor that they are actually to be elevated to share his kingdom (2:5).

"By contrast the rich person (ὁ πλούσιος), who is not explicitly called a 'brother' as is the ταπεινός, is addressed in an invective. His ταπεινῶσις is impending at the time of eschatological intervention. Drawing on a succession of biblical images, mainly from Isa 40:6–8, James graphically paints the picture of the fate of the godless rich. 'The flower of grass' (also in Ezek 28:1; Pss 90:5–6; 103:15–16; Job 14:2) will soon wither when the hot sun and the scorching sirocco wind devastate the fields in which anemones grow...

"Clearly Isa 40 is the main source of James' imagery, commencing with a reminder of the people's ταπεινῶσις in 40:2 LXX, a term used of Israel's disgrace in exile... The prophet's hope is couched in the eschatological language of a divine interposition into human affairs and destinies."

Verse 9

Καυχάσθω δὲ ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινὸς ἐν τῷ ὕψει αὐτοῦ,

καυχασμαι boast, boast about

Cf. Jer 9:23-24.

ταπεινός, ἡ, ον humble, lowly, poor, of humble circumstances

"The LXX, especially in the Psalms, uses the word to depict a person who is of little significance in the world's evaluation, even one who is oppressed by the world (see e.g., Ps 10:18; 18:27; 34:18; 81:3; 102:17; 138:6). Used in this sense, the word is sometimes paired with 'orphan' or 'widow.' The word occurs in this sense in Mary's song of praise to the Lord, when she reflects a widespread belief about the reversal of fortunes that the Lord would one day bring about: 'He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble' (Luke 1:52)... James is clearly using the word to describe the believer's socio-economic situation. If, as we think, the Christians to whom James writes have been forced to leave Jerusalem and establish new homes in Syria and northern Palestine, most of them would be facing tough financial situations as well as social dislocation and even ostracism." Moo.

ὑψος, ος n height, high position

"The poor man is enabled to go on with God in spite of the adverse circumstances of poverty because the wisdom from on high has opened the glories of heaven to him, and he counts them richer than all the trials of earth." Motyer. Cf. 2:5.

Martin comments, "In 1:9 James urges his readers to consider their status as God's chosen ones (2:5). Our author is looking at the situation with the thought that eschatological blessings await (and are presently the possession of) God's humble servants. The readers of James can enjoy their present 'exalted' status (cf. Luke 6:20) as well as anticipate their future glorious inheritance. James is writing as one who understands the kingdom of God to have been inaugurated (but not yet consummated) at the coming of Jesus. The tension of 'already' but 'not yet,' i.e., the kingdom is both present and yet its final form is expected, is present in James' thinking."

Verse 10

ὁ δὲ πλούσιος ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ὡς ἄνθος χόρτου παρελεύσεται.

πλούσιος, α, ον rich, well-to-do

There is considerable discussion as to whether ὁ πλούσιος is also a Christian, in parallel to ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινός or whether James is contrasting Christian poor with arrogant, unbelieving oppressors. Moo says it is difficult to be certain which James intended though he hesitantly favours the former. "While the evidence does not all point in the same direction, we think that the balance shifts toward the view that James in these verses addresses two Christians, a poor one and a rich one... The point of the passage is, then, that Christians must always evaluate themselves by spiritual and not material standards.

Maintaining such a perspective in a world that so insistently confronts us with a very different standard of measurement is not easy. But if the church is to be the kind of 'countercultural' society that Jesus intended it to be, establishing and propagating such a perspective is essential."

Martin takes the view that the rich spoken of here are non-Christian oppressors of the poor (cf. 2:7) and are destined for destruction.

Martin does, however, conclude by saying, "Regardless of whether the rich man is a Christian or not, the meaning of vv 10b-11 is fairly clear: riches are worthless in the face of death and judgment."

ταπεινώσις, εως f humble state,

humiliation

ἄνθος, ος n flower; blossom

χόρτος, ου m grass, vegetation, shoot

ἄνθος χόρτου is 'meadow flower,' particularly the anemone.

παρελεύσεται Verb, fut midd dep indic, 3 s

παρερχομαι pass, pass away

Wealth – and all that this world offers – is no more substantial than grass. It will soon pass away. Cf. Isa 40:6-8; Ps 103:15-16; 49:16-17. "The rich man is enabled to go on with God in spite of all the snares and enticements of wealth, because wisdom from on high has opened his eyes to the real state of earthly things, how perishable they are, how unsatisfactory they are in the long run." Motyer.

Verse 11

ἀνέτειλεν γὰρ ὁ ἥλιος σὺν τῷ καύσωνι καὶ ἐξήρανε τὸν χόρτον, καὶ τὸ ἄνθος αὐτοῦ ἐξέπεσεν καὶ ἡ εὐπρέπεια τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἀπόλετο· οὕτως καὶ ὁ πλούσιος ἐν ταῖς πορείαις αὐτοῦ μαρανθήσεται.

ἀνέτειλεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s ἀνατελλω

rise, dawn, shine

ἥλιος, ου m the sun

καύσων, ωνος m (scorching) heat

ἐξήρανεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s ξηραίνω
dry up, scorch

Cf. Jon 4:8.

ἐκπιπῶ fall off, fail
εὐπρεπεια, ας f beauty, loveliness
προσωπον, ου n face, appearance

I.e. outward appearance.

ἀπωλετο Verb, aor midd indic, 3 s ἀπολλυμι
destroy; midd be lost, perish, die
οὕτως and οὕτω adv. thus, in this way
πορεία, ας f journey, pursuit (of business or
wealth)

μαρανθήσεται Verb, fut pass indic, 3 s
μαραινομαι wither away

"Here James depicts the rich person suddenly dying even in the midst of his or her business undertakings." Moo. Like the flower, both can be flourishing one day and gone the next.

Verse 12

Μακάριος ἀνὴρ ὃς ὑπομένει πειρασμόν, ὅτι
δοκιμὸς γενόμενος λήμψεται τὸν στέφανον τῆς
ζωῆς, ὃν ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν.

This verse prepares the way for the discussion on temptation in vv. 13-18.

μακαριος, α, ον blessed, fortunate, happy

"The pronouncing of blessedness on faithful Jews who walk in Yahweh's way and turn aside from evil is common in the Wisdom literature, e.g. Pss 1:1; 31[32]:1; 33:9b[34:8b]; Prov 8:32, 34; cf. Isa 56:2; Job 5:17; Sir 14:1, 20; 26:1; and Dan 12:12... The same encomium is carried forward from the OT into the teaching of Jesus: Matt 5:3-11 // Luke 6:20-26). The theme of eschatological blessedness, i.e., joy that is pronounced to those who wait for God's salvation to deliver them from their tribulations, is one which binds together Jewish Wisdom teaching and apocalyptic hope." Martin.

ὑπομενω endure, remain behind
πειρασμος, ου m see v.2

The meaning is now moving from 'trial' to 'temptation.'

δοκιμος, ον approved, genuine, valued

Cf. δοκιμιον v.3

γενόμενος Verb, aor ptc, m nom s γινομαι
λήμψεται see v.7

The prize consequent upon passing the test.

στεφανος, ου m wreath, crown, prize

Martin writes, "στέφανος, 'crown,' is equally a common term for this reward, expressing the ideas of favor for the king (Ps 20:4-5[21:3-4]), the victor's garland (1 Cor 9:25; cf. Phil 4:1; 2 Thess 2:19) and the reward of faithful service (2 Tim 4:8; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10). The subject matter here is 'life' (i.e., living in the eschatological joy of the new age that God will bring in) 'that [God] promised to those who love him.' After στέφανος the genitive τῆς ζωῆς is best taken as genitive of content; 'life' belongs to the world of victory enjoyed by those who win through in their battle with temptation (πειρασμός) to emerge as victors. Yet James notes that it is their love for God that motivates such as gain the triumph."

ζωη, ης f life

The victor's crown is life. Cf. Rev 2:10.

ἐπηγγείλατο Verb, aor midd dep indic, 3 s
ἐπαγγελομαι promise
ἀγαπαω love, show love for

Love for God is demonstrated by the way in which we face the trials of life.

Verse 13

μηδεὶς πειραζόμενος λεγέτω ὅτι Ἀπὸ θεοῦ
πειράζομαι· ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἀπειραστός ἐστιν
κακῶν, πειράζει δὲ αὐτοὺς οὐδένα.

μηδεις, μηδεμια, μηδεν see v.6
πειραζω test, put to the test, tempt

"The NIV translation suggests that all of v. 13 is about temptation: *when tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.'* For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. Most English versions agree; but note the rendering of the NJB: 'Never, when you are being put to the test, say, 'God is tempting me'; God cannot be tempted by evil and he does not put anybody to the test.' According to the interpretation reflected in this translation, James makes the transition from testing to temptation within v. 13. This is the best way to handle the movement of the text. No solid line should be drawn between v. 12 and v. 13, as if James drops the topic of testing to take up the issue of temptation. His concern, rather, 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 loved 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 includes temptation, and temptation is itself a test. 'Persevering under the trial' (v. 12) demands that we overcome these kinds of temptations." Moo.
Cf. Prov 19:3.

ἀπειραστος, ον unable to be tempted
κακος, η, ον evil, bad, wrong, harm
οὐδεις, οὐδεμα, οὐδεν no one, nothing

God's purpose in the test or trial of our circumstances is to promote the life of holiness. His is not the voice that tempts us to give up and to go our own way.

Verse 14

ἕκαστος δὲ πειράζεται ὑπὸ τῆς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας ἐξελκόμενος καὶ δელαιζόμενος·

ἕκαστος, η, ον each, every
ἰδιος, α, ον one's own
ἐπιθυμα, ας f desire, longing, lust,
passion

Martin comments, "ἐπιθυμία is an ambivalent term in NT vocabulary. Sometimes it has good connotations (Luke 22:15; Rom 15:23; cf. Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:2) but more often it carries a pejorative sense of 'evil desire, lust, false ambition' (Rom 7:17–23; Gal 5:16–21; 1 Thess 4:5; Eph 2:3)."

Temptation has its seat in our fallen nature. Bengel remarks, "Even the suggestions of the devil do not occasion danger, before they are made 'our own'."

ἐξελκω lure away, draw away

The metaphor is from fishing: once hooked the fish is dragged into the net and is caught.

δελαιζω lure, entice; catch, trap

Echoes of Gen 3 are to be found in these verses.

Verse 15

εἶτα ἡ ἐπιθυμία συλλαβοῦσα τίκτει ἁμαρτίαν, ἡ δὲ ἁμαρτία ἀποτελεσθεῖσα ἀποκύει θάνατον.

James traces the genealogy of sin.

εἶτα adv. then, and then
συλλαβοῦσα Verb, aor act ptc, f nom s
συλλαμβανω seize, become pregnant,
conceive
τίκτω bear, give birth to, produce
ἁμαρτια, ας f sin
ἀποτελεσθεῖσα Verb, aor pass ptc, f nom s
ἀποτελεω accomplish; pass be full
grown
ἀποκυεω give birth to
θανατος, ου m death

"'Lust' is the desire that is established in the mind, and 'sin' is the desire when it passes over into action, and 'death' is the result of the process. This process is fixed; it belongs to a spiritual logic... It is parallel to the process whereby faith grows, through the test, to consistency, on to maturity, and (verse 12) to the crown of life. There is a process which leads to life and there is a process which leads to death." Motyer. Love for God (v.12) is the 'passion' which constrains us to follow one path rather than the other. Moo remarks, "Temptation will be part of our experience, as it was the experience of the Lord 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."

Verse 16

μη̄ πλανᾶσθε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί.

πλαναω lead astray, mislead, deceive
ἀγαπητος, η, ον beloved

Moo sees this verse as transitional, referring back to what has preceded it as well as introducing what follows.

Verse 17

Πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον ἄνωθέν ἐστιν, καταβαῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων, παρ' ᾧ οὐκ ἐνὶ παραλλαγῇ ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα.

δοσις, εως f giving; gift
ἀγαθος, η, ον good, useful, fitting
δωρημα, τος n gift
τελειος, α, ον complete, perfect, mature

ἀνωθεν from above

καταβαῖνον Verb, pres act ptc, n nom/acc s
καταβαινω come or go down, descend
φως, φωτος n light

Moo suggests that 'father' here means creator, the one to whom the lights owe their origin. "James, therefore, cites God's creation of the heavenly bodies as evidence of his power and continuing care for the world. The OT frequently makes a similar point (cf. Job 38:4-15, 19-21, 31-33; Ps 136:4-9; Isa 40:22, 26; and note also Sir 43:1-12)."

ἐνι there is (equivalent to ἐνεστιν)
παραλλαγή, ης f variation, change

"Connotes the orderly and periodic movements of sun, moon, planets and stars." Moo. Martin says, "denotes a change, a succession of events, a movement of objects, and belongs, in one of its meanings, to the revolution of the stars in orbit." – including the alternation of day and night, light and darkness.

ἡ ορ

τροπή, ης f turning, change, variation
ἀποσκίασμα, τος n shadow, darkness

"This phrase could refer to the phases of the moon or to the constant variation of night and day. But we should probably not press for any exact correspondence. 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." Moo.

The obscurity of the passage has led to the emergence of a variety of readings. God's character is marked by "unvarying goodness. He does not change His position. He is not one thing one day and another thing another day. There is no variation with God." Motyer.

Verse 18

βουληθεῖς ἀπεκύησεν ἡμᾶς λόγῳ ἀληθείας, εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἀπαρχὴν τινα τῶν αὐτοῦ κτισμάτων.

βουληθεῖς Verb, aor pass dep ptc, m nom s
βουλομαι want, desire, wish, plan
ἀποκυεω see v.15

The same verb is used to contrast the product of sinful desire with the product of God's Spirit.

ἀληθεια, ας f truth, reality

Martin writes, "The effective instrument of the divine fiat is said to be λόγος ἀληθείας, 'the word of truth.' In the OT God's word and truth are frequently joined (Deut 22:20; 2 Sam 7:28; 2 Kgs 10:6; 17:24; Pss 15:2; 118:43; Jer 23:28; Dan 8:26; Zech 8:16; Prov 22:21; Eccl 12:10). In the Pauline corpus the phrase 'word of truth' means the proclamation of the gospel or the apostolic mission and ministry (2 Cor 6:7; Eph 1:13; Col 1:5; 2 Tim 2:15)... The background here, however, is the spoken word which God uttered at creation (Gen 1:3; Ps 33:6; 107:20; 147:15; Isa 55:11; Wisd Sol 18:15; Sir 43:26) and which expressed and executed his divine will. Whether that voice of God was heard in a creative or redemptive sense (where creation would be the new creation) is yet to be decided."

εἶναι Verb, pres infin εἶμι

ἀπαρχή, ης f firstfruit, first portion (set apart to God)

Cf. 2 Thess 2:13; Rev 14:4 also Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:15. The term is used in the OT of the offerings of Israel (Exod 23:16, 19; 34:16; Lev 27:26; Num 18:18; Deut 14:23; 15:19–23). It is also related to Israel, which as the elect nation is the firstborn of Yahweh (Exod 4:22) and the chosen people (Deut 7:6; Jer 2:3).

τις, τὶ acc τινά, τὶ gen τινός dat τινί a
certain

ἀπαρχὴν τινα 'a kind of firstfruits'

κτισμα, τος n what is created, creature

"James therefore appeals to the 'new birth' of Christians as a striking example of God's good and faithful giving. James stresses the free and unconstrained nature of this giving by beginning the verses with the principle 'willing' (βουληθεῖς) variously translated 'in the exercise of his will' (NASB); 'in fulfilment of his own purpose' (NRSV); 'he chose' (NIV). God's grace has been extended through the gospel to people so as to bring into existence a foretaste, or down payment ('firstfruits'), of a redemptive plan that will eventually encompass all of creation." Moo.