

# INTRODUCTION AND JAS. 1:1-18

By Ashby L. Camp

Copyright © 2006 (revised in 2017) by Ashby L. Camp. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

### I. Author

A. It was written by "James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). This minimal identification suggests it was a James who was so well known in the Christian community that he did not need to say anything else in order to be recognized. That right away points to James the Lord's brother, as he was the most prominent James in the early church (see, Gal. 1:19, 2:9; Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18).

1. The Lord's brother James was a respected and beloved figure in the early church, especially among Jewish Christians. He was called the "righteous" or the "just" because of his character and his devotion to prayer. He was not a disciple during Jesus' earthly ministry (Jn. 7:5), and we are not told specifically of his conversion, but certainly his life was affected dramatically when the resurrected Jesus appeared to him as Paul reports in 1 Cor. 15:7.

2. Hegesippus, an early second-century Jewish Christian from Jerusalem, describes James's death in his *Memoirs* (which have survived only in fragments quoted by other authors, mainly Eusebius). He claims that James was stoned to death by the scribes and Pharisees for refusing to renounce his commitment to Jesus (Eusebius, *History of the Church* 2.23). The Jewish historian Josephus confirms the essentials of this story and enables us to date the incident to A.D. 62 (*Antiquities* 20.200-201).

B. James, the son of Zebedee, would have had been well known as one of the twelve apostles, but he did not have the prominence of the Lord's brother. Moreover, he was put to death by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2) around A.D. 44, which is probably just a little too early for him to qualify as the author of this letter. But even if the date of his death does not disqualify him as the author, there are other indicators that clearly favor the Lord's brother James as the author.

C. Before looking at those other indicators, you may be interested to know that the Hebrew name of the New Testament author we know as James (and other men in the New Testament we know as James) was the same Hebrew name as other men in Scripture we know as Jacob. Here's a quick summary of how that same Hebrew name came to be rendered differently in English.

1. The Hebrew name of the Jewish patriarch, Isaac's son, is יַעֲקֹב (Ya'qob). That name was transliterated (sounds are replicated in a different alphabet) in the LXX as Ἰακώβ.

2. Ἰακὼβ, however, did not sound like a normal Greek name, which commonly ended with an ος (omicron sigma). So if one wanted to Hellenize the name, make it sound like a more normal Greek name, one would use Ἰάκωβος rather than the strict transliteration Ἰακὼβ. But both are Greek representations of the same Hebrew name.

3. The New Testament writers kept the transliterated form Ἰακὼβ when referring to prior generations, when referring to the patriarch and to the father of Mary's husband Joseph, but they used the Hellenized form when referring to the New Testament generation. That is the Greek name by which that generation would have been known.

4. When Jerome translated the Bible into Latin in the fourth century, what is known as the Vulgate, he preserved the New Testament writers' generational distinction in representing the same Hebrew name: *Iacob* and *Iacobus*. In the fourteenth century, John Wycliffe prepared the first English translation of the complete Bible by translating the Vulgate. He turned the generational distinction in representing the same Hebrew name into two distinct names, rendering *Iacob* as Jacob and *Iacobus* as James.

5. That choice was followed in the subsequent English translations and long ago became entrenched tradition. So as Luke Timothy Johnson points out in *The Letter of James* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 93, "This letter from 'James,' therefore, is in reality a letter from 'Jacob.'"

6. The author of this letter, the Lord's brother, was no doubt named after Joseph's father, whose name is given in Mat. 1:16 as Jacob in English translations. But since we all know the Lord's brother (and others in the New Testament with his same Hebrew name) as James, that is how I will refer to him.

D. As I will explain in a minute, I understand the Letter of James to be a pastoral letter written to Jewish Christians who, having scattered from Israel (e.g., Acts 11:19), were facing economic distress, including persecution at the hands of wealthy landowners (see, II below). If that is correct, the fact the Lord's brother was a leader in the early Jerusalem church who ministered mainly to Jewish Christians makes him the most likely James to write such a letter.

E. That James the Lord's brother is the author is further supported by similarities between the Letter of James and words attributed to James the Lord's brother in Acts 15. For example:

1. The word *charein* ("greetings") is used in the greeting of Jas. 1:1 and in Acts 15:23 in the greeting of the letter sent by James to the Gentiles. The only other time it is used that way in the New Testament is in the letter from commander Claudius Lysias to Governor Felix in Acts 23:26.

2. The noun "name" (*onoma*) is the subject of the passive form of the verb *epikaleo* ("call" or "invoke") in Jas. 2:7 (name that was invoked/called over/upon you). The only

other time that occurs in the New Testament is in Acts 15:17 (over/upon whom my name was invoked/called) in the speech delivered by James.

3. The appeal "listen, my brothers" occurs in Jas. 2:5 and in Acts 15:13 at the beginning of the speech delivered by James.

F. According to Eusebius, who wrote a history of the church in the early fourth century, the letter generally was attributed to James the Lord's brother. D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo state in *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 626: "We conclude then that James the brother of the Lord is the author of the letter. This is the natural implication of the letter's own claims, it is corroborated by the New Testament and early Christian evidence, and it has no decisive argument against it."

## II. Addressees

A. Most scholars agree the letter was written to Jewish Christians. This is suggested by:

1. James assumes familiarity with and acceptance of the Old Testament (2:8-11, 2:21-25, 4:5-6, 4:12, 5:10, 5:17-18).

2. He refers to their meeting place as a "synagogue" (2:2), terminology that would resonate particularly with Jews.

3. He addresses them as "adulteresses" (4:4), which assumes familiarity with the Old Testament tradition likening the Lord's covenant with his people to a marriage relationship.

4. He cites the standard Jewish confession of the oneness of God (part of the *Shema*) taken from Deut. 6:4 (2:19).

5. He addresses them as "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (1:1).

a. "Twelve tribes" was used by Jews to describe the regathered people of the last days, the true people of God. For James, this surely meant Christians, the end-time Israel regathered in the form of twelve "apostolic tribes," the faith descendants of the twelve Jewish apostles.

b. The reference to them as "in the Dispersion" probably is another indication of their Jewish ethnicity. "Dispersion" (*diaspora*) normally was used to denote Jews living outside of Israel (see Jn. 7:35). The word could be used figuratively for Christians in general (those who live away from their heavenly "homeland" – see, 1 Pet. 1:1), but as Douglas Moo notes (p. 50), "the early date and Jewish audience of James suggest a more literal meaning of the term here."

c. Thus, Peter Davids states in *Commentary on James*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 64, "[A]ccepting as we do the Jewish Christian origin of this epistle, the most natural way of reading this phrase [in the Dispersion] is as an address to the true Israel (i.e. Jewish Christians) outside of Palestine (i.e. probably in Syria and Asia Minor)." Craig Blomberg and Mariam Kamell likewise state in *James*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 48, "the twelve tribes of the dispersion' most likely refer to a collection of Jewish-Christian congregations somewhere outside Israel toward the eastern end of the Mediterranean basin, perhaps in Syria."

B. Most of the addressees were poor and were being oppressed by their unbelieving rich neighbors (1:2-3, 1:9-12, 2:5-7, 2:15, 5:1-11).

1. They perhaps had been scattered from Jerusalem and its confines by persecution such as that described in Acts 11:19: "Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews." They were trying to establish new lives in new and often hostile environments. Andreas Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles state in *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 713:

Given the likely date of the letter, there does seem to be a specific group and occasion that would fit the letter's contents. After the stoning of Stephen, the Jerusalem believers (quite a large number by this time) were scattered outside Jerusalem. The injunctions in the letter seem appropriate for both wealthy and poor, and in particular portray wealthy landowners oppressing poor laborers. Those displaced by persecution would certainly find themselves working essentially as migrant workers (though some might flourish).

2. As Douglas Moo notes in *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 10, "The middle first century in the Middle East was marred by famine and general economic distress as well as by a tendency for wealthy people to buy up land and force farmers to work their land on their own terms (cf. Jas. 5:1-6)."

C. The original readers were experiencing ethical problems in the form of anger, evil speech, favoritism, and various sins of division. It is likely these various sins were related to their oppression (note 5:9) and dislocation.

### III. Date

A. The letter must have been written after James became a prominent leader of the Jerusalem church, so after around A.D. 42 (see Acts 12:17). And since he was executed in A.D. 62, it obviously was written before that. That range reasonably can be narrowed by certain historical circumstances.

B. The error of "faith only" salvation that James addresses in 2:14-26 was probably a misrepresentation of Paul's teaching that had been circulated by his opponents. This requires a date late enough for this distortion of Paul's teaching to have reached Jerusalem but early enough that Paul and James had not met to clarify that teaching (they probably had such an opportunity during the famine visit in A.D. 46/47 - Acts 11:30).

C. The absence of any reference to the controversy between Jews and Gentiles with regard to the Mosaic Law suggests a date prior to A.D. 48/49. That is when this issue forcibly surfaced in the early church (Jerusalem Council was A.D. 49).

D. A date of around A.D. 45 best fits all the evidence. Paul began preaching in Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:25-26) around A.D. 43. Jewish Christians "scattered" by the persecution following Stephen's death had traveled to Antioch and other places around Israel (Acts 11:19). Some of them probably misunderstood Paul's teaching and transmitted that misunderstanding to the church in Jerusalem. James writes this letter to minister to his scattered flock.

E. If that is correct, this is the earliest of the New Testament writings. Craig Blomberg and Mariam Kamell conclude (p. 35):

With this short letter, therefore, we have what is probably the first NT document written and the first existing Christian writing of any kind of which we know. James, the (half-)brother of the Lord Jesus and chief elder in Jerusalem during the first generation of Christianity (or at least from about A.D. 44-62), is writing to a group of primarily Jewish-Christian congregations, most likely in the mid-to-late forties, and probably somewhere in or around Syria. We have no indication of where James himself resided at this time, but Jerusalem is obviously the best guess.

#### IV. Structure

A. Martin Luther wrote that James "throws things together chaotically," and many scholars throughout history have echoed that opinion. They were, and many still are, convinced that the Epistle of James is a hodgepodge of loosely connected discourses on diverse subjects, a literary mosaic that lacks the continuity of thought necessary to qualify as a true epistle. For example, James Thompson states in Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 447:

It is composed primarily of self-contained sections that appear to be connected only loosely by catchwords (e.g., 1:4-5). Little sequence or development can be detected, as the author speaks authoritatively on a variety of subjects. The "epistle" is similar in form to such Jewish documents as Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus, and *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.

B. Today most scholars grant that there is a broad or general coherence of thought in the letter – such as it having a prescript (1:1), an introduction (1:2-27), and a main body (2:1-5:20) – but no attempt to provide a more detailed flow of thought within and across those boundaries has gained widespread support. The continuing disagreement over more refined outlines or structural proposals is taken by some as proof the letter lacks any such detailed structure.

C. With that caution duly noted, I must say I disagree with it. I am convinced there is a logical movement or flow of thought throughout the letter. My understanding, which I published in an academic journal (*Restoration Quarterly*) in 1994 under the title "Another View on the Structure of James," is that James is a genuine and coherent pastoral letter that was written to strengthen and instruct impoverished Christians who were being oppressed by their rich neighbors. As Donald Guthrie concludes in *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 748:

It would seem from this epistle that the believers were mainly poor. The allusions to the rich are more intelligible if these were unbelievers who were on the fringe of the church and were taking advantage of their wealth and influence to intimidate the poor Christians. At the same time rich men must at times have attended the Christian synagogues, otherwise the discussion in chapter 2 would not be relevant.

D. I will unfold this structure or movement of thought as we work through the text. I think it significantly illuminates the meaning of James's words, but you will need to decide whether the outline represents James's thought or is something imposed on the text. If you would like to see a fuller defense of my proposed structure, the paper I mentioned is available on my website: [theoutlet.us](http://theoutlet.us). It is in the list of articles that appears when you click the "Bible Studies" tab. What I am passing out now is simply the bare outline of how I see the letter's structure. You might want to hold onto it throughout the study as it will help you to know where we are in the larger picture.

#### Jas. 1:1-18

### **I. Greeting (1:1) – James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: greetings.**

A. James implicitly confesses the deity of Jesus by announcing his slavery to both God and Jesus and by employing the terms "Lord" and "Christ" in reference to Jesus.

1. To be a slave of someone was to be their property, to be subject to their control and direction. In so describing himself, James is acknowledging his subservient status, but he also is claiming the honor and authority of being a "slave *of God*," a slave of the sovereign of the universe.

2. In the Old Testament, the title "slave (singular) of Yahweh" was used of those who came to enjoy an especially honored relationship with God, great leaders of the people of Israel, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Job. So, in addition to acknowledging his subservience to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, James was suggesting his authority to address – and admonish – the readers.

B. The amazing thing is that Jesus was his half-brother! We know that at one point Jesus' brothers did not believe him (Jn. 7:3-5); they even thought he was out of his mind (Mk. 3:20-21, 31). What happened to create this faith? As I said, we are not told specifically, but Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 15:7 that the resurrected Jesus appeared to his brother James! That certainly would turn a person around.

C. According to Josephus, in A.D. 62 Jesus' brother James was put to death at the instigation of the Jewish high priest (Ananus) for supposedly having transgressed the law, charges that Hegesippus (as reported by Eusebius) makes clear were related to his faith in Christ.

## II. Encouragement and Instruction for Trials (1:2 - 2:13)

### A. Encouragement to endure oppression by rich (1:2-12)

1. maturing effect of trials (1:2-4) – **<sup>2</sup>Consider it all joy, my brothers, whenever you fall into various kinds of trials, <sup>3</sup>knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>4</sup>And let endurance complete its work so that you may be complete and whole, lacking in nothing.**

a. The oppression they were undergoing at the hands of rich oppressors was a *faith test* because it was religiously motivated (2:6-7) and/or was perceived by them as a sign of divine disfavor with their faith. It was difficulty that put pressure on their faith in Christ, something they perceived could be relieved or lessened by unfaithfulness.

b. James encourages them to endure the trials by reminding them of the spiritual benefits that accompany them; they are a kind of "spiritual aerobics." Though they are difficult to undergo, they produce something of greater value than the pain they cause. Specifically, they produce or develop the quality or characteristic of endurance (perseverance, patience, steadfastness), the capacity to keep on keeping on, to continue resolutely in faithfulness through suffering and pressure to quit. And if allowed to complete its work, this endurance, this increased capacity or strength to stand that emerges from the fire of testing, will bring the disciple to full spiritual maturity.

c. From that perspective, faith tests are grounds for rejoicing because they are an opportunity for spiritual strengthening and growth. I think of the apostles at the end of Acts 5 rejoicing after having been beaten for preaching Christ. They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus (v. 41). Their suffering for the faith was viewed in a larger context that transformed it into a ground of rejoicing.

d. This idea is expressed elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, in Heb. 12:7-11 the writer says the mistreatment his readers were facing because of their allegiance to Christ was divine discipline, something God was allowing in order ultimately to bless his children (see also, Rom. 5:2b-5 and 1 Pet. 1:6-7). It is not pleasant at the time, but it produces something of great value.

2. availability of needed wisdom (1:5-8) – **<sup>5</sup>But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all without reservation and without reprimanding, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup>But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup>For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord, <sup>8</sup>[being] a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

a. Trials magnify one's need for wisdom. The pain makes it easy to be deceived about the course one should take. Under the pressure of hardship, the sinful path that takes one away from rather than through the trial can seem very attractive, and all sorts of rationalizations can be whipped up to justify unfaithfulness. In addition, one needs wisdom to recognize and appreciate that God is in fact working through the trials. As Ralph Martin notes in *James*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 17, "The readers are facing some real problems arising from persecution, and it is the gift and application of wisdom to see these trials in their proper light and respond accordingly."

b. James encourages his readers to endure their trials by promising them that the wisdom needed during such times is available from God for the asking. God not only gives without reservation (or generously), he also gives without scolding us for not already having the wisdom we need. So there should be no hesitation in asking for wisdom.

c. With wisdom, they will be able to see sin for what it is, to penetrate the fog of rationalization, and thus be able to discern the right course to take. They also will be able to grasp through the pain that God is working in their trials for their benefit. He has not turned on them or abandoned them.

d. James cautions, however, that such asking must be done in faith. The one who "doubts" will not receive anything.

(1) The word translated "doubting/doubts" (*diakrinō*) means (in the middle voice) "dispute with oneself." Moo says (p. 60), "[A]s the word's basic meaning suggests, James is probably thinking of a strong kind of doubting: a basic division within the believer that brings about wavering and inconsistency of attitude toward God." In other words, James probably is not saying that a prayer request (for wisdom or anything else) will be granted only for one who is absolutely certain it will be granted, only for one who harbors zero doubt about God's will in that specific instance. He is saying it won't be granted to one who is divided in his allegiance to God, to one who is a spiritual schizophrenic.



(2) This is confirmed in vv. 6b-8, where the doubter is portrayed as a wave driven and tossed by the wind and is labeled a "double-minded man" who is unstable in all he does.

(a) The image of a wave blown about is taken from Jewish tradition (e.g., Philo). As Moo remarks (p. 61), "The picture here is not of a wave mounting in height and crashing to shore, but of the swell of the sea, never having the same texture and shape from moment to moment, but always changing with the variations in wind direction and strength."

(b) The word translated "double-minded" (*dipsychos*) literally is "double-souled." This is the first known occurrence of this word in Greek literature. James, who uses the same word in 4:8, may have coined it. It refers to one who has a divided heart, who does not display a wholehearted and consistent faith commitment to God.

(c) This person is not marked by occasional doubt or lapse but is unstable in all he does. He suffers from a basic inconsistency in attitude and spirit. Peter Davids summarizes the description this way (p. 75):

The author, then, concludes his description of the doubter with a strong condemnation: his divided mind, when it comes to trusting God, indicates a basic disloyalty toward God. Rather than being a single-minded lover of God, he is one whose character and conduct is unstable, even hypocritical. No wonder he should expect nothing from God! He is not in the posture of a trusting child at all.

3. contrasting positions and fates (1:9-12) – **<sup>9</sup>Let the lowly brother boast in his high position, <sup>10</sup>but the rich man in his humiliation, for he will pass away like a flower of the grass. <sup>11</sup>For the sun rose with the searing heat and dried the grass, and its flower fell and the beauty of its appearance perished; so also the rich man will wither away in his pursuits. <sup>12</sup>Blessed is the man who endures a trial, for having been proven, he will receive the crown of life which [God] has promised to those who love him.**

a. James encourages his readers in their trials by contrasting their exalted position and glorious future in Christ with the low position and bleak future of their oppressors. However difficult the Christian's life in this world, he can always "boast" or "take pride in" the high position to which he's been exalted by God through Christ. (It is fine to boast in God's work.) The rich unbeliever, on the other hand, has nothing to "boast" about except the low position he has in the eyes of God. This obviously is irony. Since the rich man so loves to boast, let him boast in the fact he is out of God's favor.

b. There is a scholarly disagreement over whether the rich man here is a believer or an unbeliever. I side with commentators like Peter Davids, Sophie Laws, Ralph Martin, Robert Wall, and Scot McKnight in identifying the rich man as an unbeliever.

c. I think it is a mistake to separate v. 12 from vv. 9-11 and begin a new paragraph with v. 12 as is done in many English translations (e.g., ESV, NIV). Structurally, James mentions the status of the lowly brother (v. 9 – exaltation), the status of the rich man (v. 10 – humiliation), the fate of the rich man (vv. 10b-11 – pass away and fade away), and the fate of the lowly brother (v. 12 – will receive the crown of life). Verse 12 is the parallel to the fate of the rich unbeliever.

d. The hope of eschatological reversal is a common method of encouraging those undergoing persecution (e.g., Jas. 5:1-6; Phil. 1:28-29; 2 Thess. 1:3-10; Revelation 18-22). However difficult things may be in this life, ultimately the faithful will be blessed and God's enemies will be judged. See, 2 Thess. 1:6-10; note Paul's perspective on hardships in 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

## B. Warning against slandering God during trials (1:13-18)

1. do not ascribe evil intent to God (1:13-15) – **<sup>13</sup>Let no one being tested say, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup>Rather, each man is tempted by being dragged away and enticed by his own desires. <sup>15</sup>Then the desire, after conceiving, gives birth to sin; and sin, when fully grown, brings forth death.**

a. In the midst of persecution (or other trials), one can feel that God has become an enemy, that he is trying to drive one away from him by driving one to sin. So James warns his audience not to slander God in the midst of their trials by claiming that God is against them, that he is trying to induce them sin. He warns those "being *tested*" or "undergoing trials" not to say they are "being *tempted*" by God. The Greek word *peirazō* has both the good sense of "testing" and the bad sense of "tempting," and that distinction must be recognized here.

b. The cross of Christ forever makes clear that God is for us. God tests his children, but he never tempts them. The distinction is one of motivation. God permits hardships in the life of a believer, but he never does so with hostile motives; he never does so for the purpose of leading them into evil. He allows us to carry a weight to strengthen us, not to cause us to sin. As Moo states (p. 73), "[W]hile God may test or prove his servants in order to strengthen their faith, he never seeks to induce sin and destroy their faith."

c. If they sin, it is not because God willed it. Rather, it is because they failed to control their own desires.

(1) It is a mistake in my judgment to restrict the origin of temptation to *evil* desire, to an illicit desire to do something wrong, as a number of translations do (evil desire, wrong desire, lust). Though the Greek word *epithumia* often in the New Testament carries the narrower sense of an illicit or wrong desire, a desire to sin, it can refer to desire generally, and I think here that broader sense, a sense that includes morally neutral desires, needs to be maintained. Morally neutral desires are not wrong in themselves, but they still can

generate temptation to sin. For example, the desire for food is a proper desire that serves to keep one alive and healthy, but that desire can tempt one to steal. Attraction to the opposite sex is a proper desire that pulls one toward marriage and procreation, but that desire can tempt one to lust or to engage in sexual immorality.

(2) This is the sense in which I understand Jesus' being tempted in every way in Heb. 4:15. He was tempted to do wrong by the normal and proper desires of his humanness – not from an evil desire, a desire for sin – but he never succumbed to any of those temptations. God the Father, on the other hand, cannot be tempted (v. 13b), the difference presumably lying in the mystery of the incarnation. Jesus, the God-man, has two natures that though separate are united in one person. His temptation involved his human nature.

(3) And since I brought up Heb. 4:15, it should be noted it means that Jesus was tempted in every *category* of sin not that he experienced every specific temptation to sin known to man. For example, the fact he experienced sexual temptation need not mean he experienced temptation toward incest, bestiality, or other depraved forms of sexual misconduct.

d. But James is not concerned with those issues. His point is that, if uncontrolled, our desire will lead us beyond temptation into actual sin and that the responsibility for that sin rests squarely on our shoulders. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 10:13b, "But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able [to bear], but with the testing, he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure." We cannot excuse our sin by blaming God or our circumstances, however sorely we have been tested.

e. James warns them in v. 15b that this is serious business, that there is grave danger in yielding to temptation. He says that sinning is the first step on a road that leads to death. If sin is unchecked, if it is allowed to become "fully grown," allowed to realize its designs on one's life, it will result in death. One will be cut off from the life of God, alienated from him, which ultimately will result in one's condemnation at the final judgment. When we sin, we must repent so that sin does not become "fully grown" (the master of our lives). A life of sin, as opposed to a life of faith, will result in judgment (death).

(1) The link between sin and death is well known in the New Testament. See, e.g., Jn. 8:21; Rom. 5:12, 21, 6:23, 7:7-12; 1 Cor. 15:56. (The Greek word for "death" in Jas. 1:15b – *thanatos* – is used in each of these verses except Jn. 8:21; see also, Jas. 5:19-20.) In Rom. 8:12-14 Paul warned the Roman Christians that they would die in the full theological sense if they fell back into a lifestyle of the flesh (living like a non-Christian). He made the same point to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 6:9-10, 10:1-13), the Galatians (Gal. 5:19-21, 6:7-8), the Ephesians (Eph. 5:3-7), and the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:3-8).

(2) As Peter expressed it in 2 Pet. 2:17-22:

<sup>17</sup>These men are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm, for whom the deepest darkness of the underworld has been reserved. <sup>18</sup>For while uttering high-

sounding nonsense, they entice with licentious acts and lusts of the flesh those who are just escaping from those who live in error, <sup>19</sup>promising them freedom while themselves being slaves of depravity - for a man has become a slave to whatever has overcome him. <sup>20</sup>For if, after escaping from the pollutions of the world by the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they have been overcome by again becoming entangled in these things, their last state has become worse to them than the first. <sup>21</sup>For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn from the holy commandment that was passed on to them. <sup>22</sup>It has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to its vomit," and "a washed sow returns to wallowing in the mud."

2. God seeks only our good (1:16-18) – **<sup>16</sup>Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. <sup>17</sup>Every good act of giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is neither change nor a shifting shadow. <sup>18</sup>Having willed, he brought us into being by the word of truth, so that we might be a kind of firstfruits of his creation.**

a. James urges them not to allow the pain of their trials to deceive them about God's commitment to their welfare (as 1:13 suggests was a danger). God is not an adversary. He seeks only to bless them, as evidenced by the fact he ("Father of lights" speaks of his good creation) is the source of every good act of giving and of every perfect gift. God is their supreme benefactor, and his commitment to their welfare is unchanging because he himself is unchanging.

b. The word κτίσμα in v. 18b means that which is created (by God), and here I think it refers generally to animate and inanimate creation, which is why I render it "creation" instead of "creatures." This is the meaning given for the word in this verse in Danker's *Greek New Testament Lexicon*, it is how it is rendered in NJB, and it is the equivalent of NET's and NIV's "all he created."

c. The ultimate expression of God's good giving is his giving them (these Christians) new birth through the gospel, the word of truth. And in their new birth, this first generation of Christians is a promise not only of a harvest of more converts but a harvest that ultimately will involve all of creation. God is reaping a harvest from all that he fashioned. Like Paul in Romans 8, James alludes to a tie between Christians and the redemption of creation.

d. Moo comments (p. 80), "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." Davids states (p. 90), "They have been reborn by the word of truth, the gospel. . . . But redemption does not stop here, for the full harvest will follow the firstfruits and the consummation will include the whole creation." Kurt Richardson states in *James*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 87, "those saved out of lost humanity will be a firstfruits of God's saving work that reaches every component of

creation." The note in the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* says, "The spiritual birth of believers is the first stage in God's cosmic plan to remake the entire universe."