

JAMES

A 12-WEEK STUDY



Greg Gilbert

Knowing the Bible: James, A 12-Week Study

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S E R I E S P R E F A C E

KNOWING THE BIBLE, as the series title indicates, was created to help readers know and understand the meaning, the message, and the God of the Bible. Each volume in the series consists of 12 units that progressively take the reader through a clear, concise study of that book of the Bible. In this way, any given volume can fruitfully be used in a 12-week format either in group study, such as in a church-based context, or in individual study. Of course, these 12 studies could be completed in fewer or more than 12 weeks, as convenient, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each study unit gives an overview of the text at hand before digging into it with a series of questions for reflection or discussion. The unit then concludes by highlighting the gospel of grace in each passage (“Gospel Glimpses”), identifying whole-Bible themes that occur in the passage (“Whole-Bible Connections”), and pinpointing Christian doctrines that are affirmed in the passage (“Theological Soundings”).

The final component to each unit is a section for reflecting on personal and practical implications from the passage at hand. The layout provides space for recording responses to the questions proposed, and we think readers need to do this to get the full benefit of the exercise. The series also includes definitions of key words. These definitions are indicated by a note number in the text and are found at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, to help understand the Bible in this deeper way, we urge readers to use the ESV Bible and the *ESV Study Bible*, which are available in various print and digital formats, including online editions at www.esvbible.org. The *Knowing the Bible* series is also available online. Additional 12-week studies covering each book of the Bible will be added as they become available.

May the Lord greatly bless your study as you seek to know him through knowing his Word.

J. I. Packer
Lane T. Dennis

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW



Getting Acquainted

James's letter is one of the most quoted books of the entire Bible. It's filled with famous phrases and quotations that often make their way into Christian conversation:

- Faith produces steadfastness.
- God cannot be tempted.
- Every good and perfect gift comes from above.
- Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.
- Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.
- Even the demons believe—and shudder!
- Faith apart from works is dead.
- Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

On the other hand, James is also full of passages that have left Christians scratching their heads. Does James have it in for rich people? What is the point of anointing a sick person with oil? Does James teach that if you just have enough faith, God will always heal? Then there are even larger and more pointed questions. Why doesn't James talk very much about the cross? Does he understand the gospel the same way the rest of the New Testament writers do? And isn't he disagreeing with Paul in chapter 2 about the relationship between faith, works, and salvation?

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

These are all important questions, and in the course of this study we'll address all of them. It helps, however, to realize that the primary message driving James's letter is that Christians' faith in the gospel should work itself out in a life of obedience. As he says in 1:22, believers in Jesus should not just *hear* the word and believe it, but they should also *do what it says*. The gospel of Jesus—which James understands deeply and affirms completely—results in a new life of obedience when a person believes. That's James's message, and as we come to understand that, his book will be a stirring exhortation to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called.

Placing It in the Larger Story

James is an intensely practical book, filled with exhortations to Christians about the way they should live their lives now that they have been given new life in Jesus. It is filled with allusions to and quotations of the teaching of Jesus, and it includes more imperatives (commands) per word than any other New Testament book. For these reasons, James has been called “the Proverbs¹ of the New Testament.”

James is therefore highly relevant to the Christian life. Unlike many of the other books of the New Testament, James's aim is not to give a theological presentation of the gospel. Rather, he writes his book to those who already believe the gospel, and his goal is to help them live faithfully as followers of Jesus. There are many different and seemingly disconnected themes in James—perseverance under trial, riches and poverty, wisdom, the danger of the tongue, prayer, and faith and works. But what ties them all together is James's desire to take the teaching of Jesus and apply it to the Christian's personal life.

Key Verse

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”
(James 1:22)

Date and Historical Background

The book of James was written by a man who identifies himself simply as “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1). But who was this James? The very plainness of the address gives us some clue, because there were not many Jameses in the early church who could get away with such a simple identification. In fact, there was probably only one James who was famous enough to call himself simply “James” and expect that everyone would know who he was—James the brother of Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph.

James died in AD 62, so the letter had to have been written before that. Further, if James wrote his letter after the Jerusalem council of AD 48–49, it’s hard to imagine that he wouldn’t have mentioned those events. Therefore, the book of James was almost certainly written in the mid-40s. That means that—despite the way the New Testament books are arranged—James likely wrote his book several years before Paul wrote his letters and only 15 years or so after Jesus had died and risen again.

James is a general epistle, meaning that it doesn’t seem to be written to any particular church, but rather to all Christian churches in general. It is addressed to “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion,”² which probably means that James has Jewish Christians primarily in mind. The themes he addresses, however, are universal. Persevering under trial, not favoring the rich and powerful, taming the tongue—these are issues which will confront every Christian church and every believer.

Outline

- I. Greeting (1:1)
- II. The Testing of Faith (1:2–18)
- III. Hearing and Doing the Word (1:19–27)
- IV. The Sin of Partiality (2:1–13)
- V. Faith without Works Is Dead (2:14–26)
- VI. The Sin of Dissension in the Community (3:1–4:12)
- VII. The Sins of the Wealthy (4:13–5:12)
- VIII. The Prayer of Faith (5:13–18)
- IX. Concluding Admonition (5:19–20)

As You Get Started . . .

How have you thought about the book of James in the past? Does it confuse you, or have you found it helpful in your walk as a Christian?

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

After reading this introduction, why do you think James wrote his book? What is the main thing he's trying to accomplish in his readers' lives?

Why do you think James doesn't spend time giving a systematic presentation of the gospel? How is his aim different from Paul's aim in, say, Romans or Galatians?

Which parts of James most perplex or confuse you? Are there any parts of the book to which you want to give special attention as you begin this study?

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you engage in this study of James. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that you would like to learn throughout this study of James.

Definitions

¹ **Proverb** – A brief saying that conveys a lesson about how to live wisely and well, usually drawn from observations about nature and life. The book of Proverbs contains the vast majority of biblical proverbs, but they occur in other books as well.

² **Dispersion** – From the Greek for "scattering," refers to the numerous relocations of large groups of Israelites/Jews throughout the world, including to Assyria and Media (722 BC), Babylon (586), Alexandria in Egypt (c. 300), Phrygia (c. 200), and Rome (c. 63). This dispersion resulted in greater exposure of the Jews to other peoples and also laid the groundwork for the worldwide spread of the gospel during the first century.

WEEK 2: THE TESTING OF FAITH

James 1:1–11



The Place of the Passage

James opens with an exhortation to his readers to persevere under trial. As those who are dispersed throughout the world, sometimes even by persecution, they are hard-pressed on every side. James encourages his readers to realize that one important mark of the Christian life is to trust God rather than self—even when life seems unbearably hard. If you do that, he says, God will use your trials to make you a more faithful follower of Jesus.

The Big Picture

James tells his readers not to despair because of their trials, but rather to bear up under them, relying on God, recognizing that he is using their trials for their good.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, James 1:1–11. Then review the shorter passages below and write your own notes on the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, page 2391, also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. Joy in Trials (1:1–4)

James identifies himself as “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Knowing that James would have grown up with Jesus—known him as a child, a teenager, a young adult—does it seem remarkable to you that James would now call his brother “Lord”¹ and “Christ”?² What do you think happened that convinced James that Jesus, his crucified brother, is here and now the Lord and Messiah?³

James addresses his letter “to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion,” but he is not writing only to Jewish believers. He is alluding to the fact that just as the children of Israel were dispersed throughout the world in their exile, so also believers in Christ are now aliens and strangers who are waiting for God to gather them home to himself (see also 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11). What, then, is the connection between verses 1 and 2? How does a reminder to Christians of their status as aliens and strangers in this world set up James’s exhortation to them to “count it all joy” when they meet trials?

Verses 2–4 are a chain argument in which one thing leads to another. Trace the chain that James describes. What is the end result of our trials?

The word translated “steadfastness” in verse 3 literally means “to remain under,” like a person holding up a heavy weight for a long period of time. Think of someone who lifts weights for exercise. What is the “full effect” of that person’s “steadfastness?” What are some of the effects of our remaining steadfast under the weight of trials?

2. Wisdom from God in Trials (1:5–8)

The exhortation in verse 5 to ask God for wisdom is not disconnected from the theme of persevering under trials. Read Proverbs 2:1–15. What is wisdom? Where does it come from? What are the benefits of having wisdom?

As in the Old Testament, wisdom is a God-given and God-centered discernment regarding God’s world and how best to live in it. In other words, it is seeing the world and your circumstances as God sees them and then acting in accord with that knowledge. How, then, does God see our trials in this life? How is that different from the way we are tempted to see them? If we could understand our trials as God understands them, how would we act differently?

The word translated “doubt” in verse 6 is literally “dispute.” It is used in many different contexts to refer to a dispute with another person. Here, though, James uses the word to refer to a person disputing within one’s own self! In other words, to *doubt* is to be a person of a fundamentally divided mind and a fundamentally inconsistent attitude toward God. It’s a reckless and wavering distrust—a *refusal* finally to trust God. The point is not that a Christian never has doubts; it’s that a Christian never allows his mind to become so divided and self-disputing that it *welcomes* those doubts. A Christian will always strive to take the side of God and truth against doubts when they arise. What are some

WEEK 2: THE TESTING OF FAITH

strategies Christians can use to fight doubt? How can you resist becoming “a double-minded person, unstable in all your ways?”

3. Don't Trust in Yourself, No Matter Your Station in Life (1:9–11)

James has much to say in his book about poverty and wealth, and how God expects us to use the resources he gives us. Most of the time in this book, the wealthy are evil people who are oppressing James's readers (e.g., 2:6 and 5:1–5). But is that always true? Read 4:13–15. James is speaking here to a group of relatively wealthy businesspeople who are traveling to another city in order to make a profit. But it also seems that these businesspeople might be believers! Here's why: When James addresses wicked, rich oppressors, he doesn't exhort them to do anything; he simply condemns them. Here, though, he treats these businesspeople as Christians, teaching them to adjust their thinking and their speech to fit true theology. So does James set up a simplistic “poor equals righteous, rich equals wicked” equation? Does the rest of the Bible? What is the Bible's general opinion of wealth—that it is evil, or that it is dangerous? What other passages of Scripture support your answer?

In verses 9–11, James points out our universal tendency to boast in ourselves and to rely on our own accomplishments. Both rich people and poor people have this tendency, so James addresses them both. He exhorts the poor person to boast in his “exaltation”—that is, in what God has done in Christ—rather than to despair because of poverty. And he exhorts the rich person to boast in his or her “humiliation”—that is, in his or her identification with the suffering Christ—and not in riches, because the riches will soon pass away. How does material wealth tend to lead to self-reliance? Does material poverty *always* lead to reliance on God? If not, what kinds of things can it lead a person wrongly to rely on?

What kinds of things besides wealth do we tend to rely on and boast in for a sense of well-being and security, rather than on God?

For each of the things you mentioned in the previous question, explain why it is foolish to rely on them. Why is it better and wiser to rely on God?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

A SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST. Some readers think that the letter of James barely qualifies as a Christian book because it doesn't give a systematic presentation of the gospel. That, however, is to misunderstand what James is doing. He is writing his book to people who already understand the gospel, and he is helping them to see how to live in a way that reflects their faith in Jesus. James understands very well the truth of the gospel and of Jesus' identity. Even in his very first line, he identifies himself as a servant of Jesus *the Christ*. That is not Jesus' last name! It is a theologically rich title that identifies Jesus as the promised Messiah—the king who would save his people from their sins.

AN UNWAVERING FAITH. The fundamental call of the gospel is for us to “repent⁴ and believe” (Mark 1:15). In other words, we are to put our faith⁵ in Jesus—to rely on him and trust him. James calls for exactly that kind of faith in this section of his book. True faith in Christ is not a faith that hedges its bets—“I’ll rely 90 percent on Jesus, but 10 percent on my own righteousness.”

WEEK 2: THE TESTING OF FAITH

Authentic faith is not divided, double-minded, and unstable. It's a faith that gives itself wholly to Jesus, relying on him and him alone for salvation.

BOASTING IN CHRIST. James says that whether we are rich or poor, our only boast should be in what God has done for us. He makes the point with rich irony. Whereas the world sees the poor as contemptible, they should boast that God has exalted them in Christ. And whereas the world sees the rich as honorable, they should boast that God has humbled them and shown them their need for salvation. Paul says something very similar in Galatians 6:14 when he writes, "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Whole-Bible Connections

THE TWELVE TRIBES IN THE DISPERSION. Centuries before the birth of Jesus, the twelve tribes of Israel were exiled from their land and scattered among the nations of the world. The northern kingdom was carried into exile by the Assyrian empire, and the southern kingdom was exiled by the Babylonian empire. The Old Testament prophets held out the hope that one day God would return his people to their land and restore them (Jer. 31:7–14; Ezek. 37:15–28). During their exile, however, they had to endure as aliens and strangers. The New Testament applies those same categories to believers in Christ. Peter, for example, addresses his first letter to the "elect exiles of the Dispersion" (1 Pet. 1:1). Like God's people centuries ago, we Christians are a people waiting for our final redemption when Jesus returns.

THE BENEFIT OF TRIALS. The New Testament is very clear that believers will face trials of many kinds. Just as our Lord was tested in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11), and just as he endured temptation (Heb. 4:15), so we too are called to endure trial and temptation in this life. However, the Bible also promises us that God will use our trials for our good, strengthening us and leading us to rely more fully on him. Paul makes a similar point in Romans 5:3–5, and Peter too compares the effect of trials on our faith to the way fire purifies gold (1 Pet. 1:7).

WISDOM FROM GOD. The book of Proverbs tells us that wisdom comes only from God himself (Prov. 2:6). It also tells us that wisdom existed before the world was created (Prov. 8:22–23), and that it is the *order* according to which he created the world (Prov. 8:27–31). Wisdom, therefore, is much more than we usually think. It is not just pithy sayings or clever solutions to problems. It is actually the very mind of God, the pattern according to which he created and ordered the world. To have wisdom, therefore, is to see the world as God sees it, and then to act in accordance with that understanding. And of course, how has God most fully and completely revealed his mind and character to us? Through his Son, Jesus Christ, the incarnate⁶ Word of God.

Theological Soundings

JESUS AS CHRIST. James bases his entire book on his confession of Jesus as the Christ (1:1). He understands his brother to be the long-awaited Messiah, with all that entails. Jesus is the King who had come to inaugurate God’s kingdom,⁷ but he is also the King who would suffer in the place of his people in order to qualify them to share in that kingdom.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD. James says that God “gives generously” to those who ask him. The Bible’s consistent witness is that God is unspeakably generous and merciful. From his mercy to Adam, to his rescue of Noah from the flood, to his choosing of Israel to be his special people, God proves himself to be a good God, not a stingy and grasping one.

HUMANS ARE MORTAL. Our physical lives do not last forever. Just as the grass withers and the flower fades, so we are here one moment and gone the next. That reality powerfully underlines James’s main point—that our faith should be not in our own wavering, unstable selves, but in the unchanging and immortal God.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of James 1:1–11 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. James 1:1–11

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you engage in this study of James. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight or underline these to review again in the future.

Definitions

- ¹ **Lord** – Someone superior in authority or status to another, similar to “master.” It is a common translation for several different Hebrew titles for God in the OT, and in the NT refers to Jesus, who is enthroned as ruler of the kingdom of God.
- ² **Christ** – Transliteration of the Greek for “Anointed One” (equivalent to Hebrew Messiah). The term is used throughout the NT as a title for Jesus, indicating his role as Messiah and Savior.
- ³ **Messiah** – Transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning “Anointed One,” the equivalent of the Greek word Christ. Originally applied to anyone specially designated for a particular role, such as king or priest. Jesus himself affirmed that he was the Messiah sent from God (Matt. 16:16–17).
- ⁴ **Repentance** – A complete change of heart and mind regarding one's overall attitude toward God and one's individual actions. True regeneration and conversion is always accompanied by repentance.
- ⁵ **Faith** – Trust in or reliance upon something or someone deemed trustworthy despite a lack of concrete proof. Salvation, which is purely a work of God's grace, can be received only through faith (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:8–9).
- ⁶ **Incarnation** – Literally “(becoming) in flesh,” this word, formed from Latin, refers to God becoming a human being in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.
- ⁷ **Kingdom of God/heaven** – The sovereign rule of God. At the present time, the fallen, sinful world does not belong to the kingdom of God, since it does not submit to God's rule. Instead, God's kingdom can be found in heaven and among his people on earth (Matt. 6:9–10; Luke 17:20–21). After Christ returns, however, the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of God (Rev. 11:15). Then all people will, either willingly or regretfully, acknowledge his sovereignty (Phil. 2:9–11). Even the natural world will be transformed to operate in perfect harmony with God (Rom. 8:19–23).

WEEK 3: THE PROCESS OF TEMPTATION

James 1:12–18



The Place of the Passage

Having encouraged his readers to endure trials with perseverance and steadfastness, James now begins to teach them that they should not blame God for the temptations with which they struggle. On the contrary, God is infinitely good and faithful. He does not change, he is not capricious, and he gives good gifts to his children. Just look at what he has done for you, James says, in giving you new spiritual life! No, the sins you face—and commit—result from your own heart being enticed and lured away by evil desires. So stand firm, he tells them, because when the test is over, reward is waiting!

The Big Picture

James 1:12–18 shows us how our hearts respond sinfully to temptation and directs us not to blame God for our sins, but to find strength in his goodness and grace.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, James 1:12–18. Then review the shorter passages below and write your own notes on the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, page 2392, also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. Reward for Those Who Endure (1:12)

What is the reward that James promises will come to those who steadfastly endure trials? Can you think of other passages of Scripture that point to similar rewards?

How should the promise of reward for endurance motivate us in our walk with Christ?

2. The Process of Temptation (1:13–15)

We often read 1:12–13 as if James is moving from one topic to a wholly different one—as if he has been talking about trials but is now moving on to talk about temptation. The two concepts are tightly related, however, because trials in our lives will always lead us to temptation. Financial struggle, for example, leads us to distrust God. Stress tempts us to be selfish. Name some specific trials

that you have experienced, and consider the sins that you were tempted to fall into because of those trials.

The Bible teaches that God often, in his providence,¹ ordains that his people should face trials. What passages of Scripture teach that truth? What stories in the Bible illustrate it?

If God sometimes ordains that his people will face trials, what then is James saying in verse 13 that God does *not* do? (Hint: there is a difference between trial and temptation! See the note on verse 13 in the *ESV Study Bible*.)

In verses 14–15 James uses two metaphors to describe the process of temptation and sin in our hearts. The first, in verse 14, is an image from fishing. Temptation “entices” a person to bite down on sin, and then when the hook is set, he or she is “dragged away.” That is a terrifying thought. We see the pleasure of sin, are enticed by it, and then before we even realize it, we have lost all control and sin is dragging us away. How have you seen that process of temptation, enticement, sin, and dragging away play out in your own life?

WEEK 3: THE PROCESS OF TEMPTATION

The second metaphor James uses is one of conception and birth. What does it mean for a desire to “conceive?”

When once we act on our evil desires and give birth to sin, what does James say is the end result after sin “is fully grown?”

3. God’s Goodness and Faithfulness (1:16–18)

Why does James turn in verse 16 to talk about God’s goodness and faithfulness? What are his readers in danger of deceiving themselves about, with particular reference to their trials and the temptations that come with them?

With what do you think James is contrasting God when he says that “with [him] there is no variation or shadow due to change?”

What does it mean to be “brought forth?” Has James used this metaphor before in this chapter? Read John 3:1–6. Where did James get this idea of Christians having been “brought forth?”

What is the “word of truth?” If we are brought forth “by the word of truth,” do you think it’s possible for a person to be saved apart from the gospel?

James’s point in verse 18 is to show his readers that God is good and that he gives good gifts. How does his example of the gift of regeneration² accomplish that goal? (Read Romans 8:32. James is using the same kind of reasoning.)

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

THE WORD OF TRUTH. James is very clear that salvation comes through the message of the gospel, that is, the word of truth about Jesus and his work on our behalf. Paul uses the same phrase in Ephesians 1:13 when he says that those

WEEK 3: THE PROCESS OF TEMPTATION

believers were sealed with the Holy Spirit when they heard “the word of truth.” He even explains what he means by “word of truth,” calling it “the gospel of your salvation.” Salvation comes when a person hears the message about Jesus and responds to it with faith and repentance.

BROUGHT US FORTH. One of the clearest characteristics of James’s book is how much he learned from Jesus. His teaching can almost always be traced directly back to the explicit teaching of the Lord. This metaphor of salvation as birth, for example, finds its roots in Jesus’ teaching about the new birth in John 3. Becoming a Christian is not just a moral decision or “turning over a new leaf.” It is a radical change of one’s heart—a gift of new spiritual life where there was once only death. God is the giver of life, both physical and spiritual.

OF HIS OWN WILL. James is in agreement with the rest of the New Testament that salvation is not finally attributable to human will or action, but rather to God’s own will and mere mercy.³ John makes this clear in John 1:13 when he says that salvation is “not . . . of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Paul says the same thing in Romans 9:16 when he teaches, “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.” Our salvation is wholly of grace.⁴ It is not deserved, and it is not earned. God gives it to us as a gift—of his own will.

Whole-Bible Connections

FATHER OF LIGHTS. James traces God’s goodness—his desire to give good gifts—all the way back to creation. At every stage in his creating of the universe, God declares that his work is good. That reveals something to us not only about the universe that God made but also about the character of God himself. He *is* good, and therefore he *does* good! Throughout the Bible, believers confess this to be true. Joseph affirms it even in the midst of his trials (Gen. 50:20), the Israelites confessed it as they looked into the Promised Land (Deut. 26:11), and the psalmists said it over and over (Ps. 73:1 and 84:11, for example). We do not serve a grudging, stingy God, but a good and generous one!

FIRSTFRUITS OF HIS CREATURES. James may have in mind here the fact that his readers were some of the first people in the world to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. Other New Testament writings take special note of those who were “first” in believing (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15). But James may also be looking forward to the last day, when God will create a new heaven and a new earth. As the crowning act of God’s work of creation (Gen. 1:26–31), it is fitting that humans should be the “firstfruits”—the down payment, as it were—on the re-creation of the cosmos. Paul seems to teach this when he says in Romans 8:19–21 that the creation “waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God,” because in that last day creation will share in “the freedom of the

glory of the children of God.” Our salvation in Christ is the firstfruits—the crowning act of and the down payment on—God’s universe-encompassing work of redemption.

Theological Soundings

GOD AS CREATOR. James reminds us that everything begins with God. He is the Creator, the Father of lights, and the originator of everything that exists. In fact, the Bible teaches that God created the world *ex nihilo*, or “out of nothing.” He did not take preexisting material and form it into something else, nor did he simply bring “order out of chaos.” Interestingly, that is what the *pagan* deities were said to have done. But the Bible is clear that our God is no pagan deity. He did not just bring order out of chaos; he brought *everything* out of *nothing*. He is the Father of it all.

GOD IS HOLY. When James says that God cannot be tempted by evil, he affirms that God is holy⁵ and pure and perfectly righteous. God is not a mixture of good and evil motives, good and evil desires. Without fail and without exception, he is holy and good.

GOD TESTS, BUT DOES NOT TEMPT. The Bible is very clear that God does sometimes *test* his people. He tests Abraham, for example, when he tells him in Genesis 22 that he is to sacrifice his son Isaac. He also tests his people Israel in the wilderness to see whether they would obey his commands (Ex. 16:4). But God does not tempt his people to evil. When we are tempted in the midst of our trials, that is the result of our own sinful hearts, and the question is whether we will remain steadfast and endure our trials in faith, or give in to temptation and sin.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of James 1:12–18 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

WEEK 3: THE PROCESS OF TEMPTATION

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. James 1:12–18

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you engage in this study of James. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight or underline these to review again in the future.

Definitions

- ¹ **Providence** – God's good, wise, and sovereign guidance and control of all things, by which he supplies all our needs and accomplishes his holy will.
- ² **Regeneration** – The Holy Spirit's work of bringing spiritual life to a person, thus enabling him or her to love and follow God. Essentially equivalent to what is often referred to as being "born again" or "saved."
- ³ **Mercy** – Compassion and kindness toward someone experiencing hardship, sometimes even when such suffering results from the person's own sin or foolishness. God displays mercy toward his people and they, in turn, are called to display mercy toward others (Luke 6:36).
- ⁴ **Grace** – Unmerited favor, especially the free gift of salvation that God gives to believers through faith in Jesus Christ.
- ⁵ **Holiness** – A quality possessed by something or someone set apart for special use. When applied to God, it refers to his utter perfection and complete transcendence over creation. God's people are called to imitate his holiness (Lev. 19:2), which means being set apart from sin and reserved for his purposes.