



## FAITH AND DEEDS

### A BIBLE STUDY FROM JAMES

#### TESTING AND ITS SOURCE

Let's once again **READ JAMES 1:2-18**.

Our study of the first chapter of James helped us to understand:

- What testing produces – maturity and joy (verses 2-4)
- How to be victorious in times of testing – faithful prayer (verses 5-8)
- Material things are not everything – what counts is our riches in the Lord (9-11)
- The outcome of “hanging in” when trails come – the crown of life (verses 12).

In this study today the Bible teaches us about the source of testing and temptation.

**READ JAMES 1:13-15.**

On face value, how would you interpret verse 13?

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In verse 13 James is not explaining how a good God can permit evil. The situation of the people this letter was addressed to must be kept in mind. We have seen that they were

- “scattered among the nations” after the persecution the broke loose in Jerusalem;
- some most probably lost family members through the persecution
- they were severely persecuted, while many of them lost their possessions (verse 9-10);
- they were now in the new situation where they had to adjust to a new culture of non-Jewish Christians mixing as one family with those with Jewish background.

It would not be surprising to find some who now wanted to blame God, putting in front of them a test to lure them away from the faith.

**READ DEUTERONOMY 1:27- 31.** What we see in this paragraph corresponds fairly well with the situation the Christians James is addressing found themselves in.

What did the people of Deuteronomy think of God? **READ DEUT 1:27.**

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What was their major sin? **READ DEUT 1:32 AND NUMBERS 14:13**

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The question in James 1:13-15 is whether God is the cause of the impulse to abandon the faith and walk away from God. James’s focus is practical rather than theoretical. In other words, a *test* is not if God has put one there; the question is rather to trust Him to be able to carry one through trials and tribulations.

**READ GENESIS 3:1-7.**

According to this paragraph, who made the serpent/devil?

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According to this paragraph, what was the agreement between God and Adam and Eve?

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What was the major point behind the temptation of the devil?

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Did God tempt Adam and Eve?

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Who tempted Adam and Eve?

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Was God the cause of their choice? If not, who was? And who has to take the blame for their disobedience?

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**READ JAMES 1:13** again. What does the “tempting” in this verse mean?

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Different commentators interpret verse 13 in different ways.

- “God cannot be *requested* to do evil” – it does not fit smoothly in the logical sequence, nor does it fit with OT statements that some people did test God
- “God is *blameless in evil*” – this interpretation would not do justice to the Greek
- “God *ought not to be tested* by evil persons” – this meaning fits the grammar of the passage. It shows that James is drawing upon an important theme in Jewish theology: people in tight places tend to turn and challenge God. This translation shows that James is drawing upon an important theme in Jewish theology: people in tight places tend to turn and challenge God, lose faith in Him, and blame Him for unfaithfulness.

Read **EXODUS 17:7** and **DEUTERONOMY 6:16**. What does “test” in these verses mean?

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**READ JAMES 1:14**. Who has to take the blame for “being dragged away and enticed” (or “lured and enticed”)?

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Instead of blaming God, we have to admit: God does not test me; rather, I test myself! What puts a person to the test is the evil impulse within.

To be *lured* (or dragged away) and *enticed* were terms used in fishing and hunting world. It describes what happens in a sinful reality. **READ ECCLESIASTES 7:26 AND 9:12**. Is there a similarity between this verse and **JAMES 1:14**?

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James uses the same metaphor: in the first word he pictures the person enticed to a hook and drawn out, and in the second the person attracted to a trap by delicious bait.

**READ JAMES 1:15.**

It is interesting that James does not name the devil explicitly as the cause for temptation, enticing and dragging away. Sinful nature, being fatally wounded by sin, which has as its father the devil, is of course implied. But James wants us to understand that in temptation and testing, we are not like pieces on a chessboard, where we have no moral responsibility and accountability. Although we do not have a free will (our will is in bondage to sin), God created us with moral responsibility.

The problem lies within: evil desire (or passion, lust) is our problem. The stress in this verse is on the *result* of desire, not on its *origin*. The result is walking away from God because of unbelief.

It is the main thrust of James to bring to his readers the fact that their circumstances are used by God to produce perseverance. If they forget this, and start doubting God, the seed for unbelief and rebellion is sown: they are enticed to not trust Him – and before they know they will wander off in unbelief, which leads to death.

What does desire do once it is conceived?

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As a child is first conceived, then it is born, it grows up and produces offspring. **READ JAMES 1:15.** What is the similarity between natural life and sin?

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**READ ROMANS 6:23.** What does sin compensate the sinner with?

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