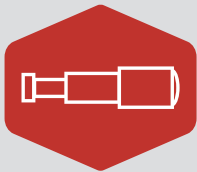




Lesson 4: Difference between Trials and Temptations

Main Idea: Temptations and trials are two different things. Temptations come to make you fail whereas trials come to strengthen you. Temptations come through fleshly desires. The way to get out of temptations is to learn from them. The way to get out of trials is through perseverance. In this lesson, you will learn the difference between trials and temptations.

Scripture: James 1:13-18



The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.

In this section you will discover James uses an interesting word. It is the word “temptation” in verse 13. It is the same word in the Greek that is used and translated as trial in verse 2. In English, two different words are used: “trial” and “temptation.” Temptation has a sinister sound to it whereas trial is morally neutral. Some look at James 1:13 and ask, “Does the Scripture here have an inherent contradiction?” For in Genesis 22:1, we read, “And the Lord God did tempt [or test] Abraham.” How can James say God does not tempt people when He tested Abraham? The difference has to do with that word “test.” Whenever Scripture says God tests someone, the word always has the connotation of a test from which one will emerge successfully. In every biblical passage where God tested somebody, the conclusion is that the person stood the test. The true metal of their faith was proven, as in Abraham’s story.

However, there is also an evil force, both external (the devil), and internal (our evil desires), that pull a person down during the test. It's important to realize God is never using the test to pull you down, nor is He the one sending the test. He is instead seeking to give you His help to overcome the test and emerge stronger.

Therefore, you are not to blame God for your trial. Although the natural response to a difficult situation that tests you is to conclude that God is the author of the temptation, James points out from a theological perspective why that is wrong. One author comments, "The word translated 'cannot be tempted' is an adjective meaning 'without temptation,' and the context makes the author's intention clear: God experiences no effects from evil's enticements."¹ Any test given by God does not have with it an enticement to sin.

Also, it is a good idea not to blame the devil. Notice that James does not even blame the devil. He says the blame lies within your own evil desires, not your environment, not your family, not the devil, not society. Your thought life in a trial can become warped, twisted, and irresponsible, and if it does, it will produce actions that give birth to death. Sin, when it is conceived, brings forth death. When a child is born, it is alive, but James reverses that idea: When sin is born—that is, when the sinful thought or attitude is carried through to its conclusion—it brings forth an action that leads to death. Here is the only biblical analogy that makes a case for abortion, and it's spiritual, not physical. If you have ungodly ideas or wrong attitudes, while they are gestating in you, abort them before they are born in the form of wrong actions. If they come forth as sinful actions, they will wind up destroying us, proving to be deadly. Temptations are not always sexual; many times they are spiritual, having to do with wrong attitudes.

However, in the midst of a trial, God sends you good and perfect gifts. How can that be? James is not saying, "Call everything that happens in your life good and perfect." God is not asking you to be a person who, when a hammer hits your thumb, looks up and says, "O, thank You, Lord, for helping me miss the nail today and for the wonderful sensation that my thumb now feels." James is not saying to play that kind of mental game. He is saying, however, that when bombs are dropping on your life, God is also parachuting down some good and perfect gifts. They are landing in the same field.

One author comments, "The background of James's thought may derive from the Jewish concept of the evil *yēšer*, which at points is associated with adultery (Davids, 84). In Jewish theology of the day, every person had two inclinations—one to do evil and the other to do good. When the former gains the upper hand, a person sins (Neusner and Green, 312)."²

¹ Guthrie, "James," 13:221.

² Guthrie, "James," 13:222.

The language seems to support the idea of someone physically dragging away a victim against their will by some desire or of a lure that is used for bait to entice someone much like a lure used to catch a fish.

James wants to make sure his readers understand that wrong thinking results in living in a wrong manner.

James teaches that every gift from God is good and perfect. One author comments, “The word translated as ‘perfect’ is *téleios*, the same word James uses in 1:4 when he speaks about letting patience ‘have its perfect work, that you may be perfect . . .’”³ (NKJV) He is saying every gift comes from God.

James is writing to Jewish Christians who understood the requirements of the tithe and firstfruits. He is reminding us that as we trust in Christ by faith, we become a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.⁴



My Lens (Eyeglasses)

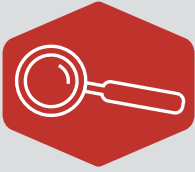
What does this Scripture say to you? Through completing the reading assignments below, you will better understand what God’s Word is saying to you.

As you persevere through a trial, you will see what special and wonderful things God is doing inside of you, and sometimes externally as well. As you go through the trial, you will discover that what God gives you will be His good and perfect gifts. These good and perfect gifts will begin to make it possible to get through the trial. He is setting you as a display of His goodness and gifts to those who do not know Him. There are times in life when you may feel absolutely pressed to the wall. When you are going through pain, often the last thing you want is the Word of the Lord to say to you, “Look at the other side.” Yet God is summoning you to take another step and not get stuck in bitterness. Consider these truths to help provide strength to you in the midst of a trial or test:

- God does not send the temptation (1:13).
- Temptation comes from your own desires (1:14).
- Your desires give birth to sin (1:15).
- Sin leads to death (1:15).
- God gives good and perfect gifts (1:16–17).
- God never changes or casts a shifting shadow (1:17).
- You are God’s prized possession (1:18).

³ Cedar and Ogilvie, *James / 1 & 2 Peter / Jude*, 34:40.

⁴ Cedar and Ogilvie, *James / 1 & 2 Peter / Jude*, 34:41.



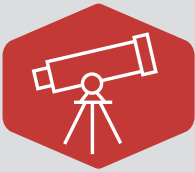
The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.

Application:

- Write down your answer to the following questions here or in your journal:
 - » Who appears in this passage?
 - » Where is this passage taking place?
 - » When is this passage occurring?
 - » Why is this passage important?
 - » What is happening in this passage?
 - » How does this passage apply to my life?
- Circle and write down any reoccurring words in this passage.
- Describe in your own words the difference between temptations and trials.

- What are the four words James uses to describe the sequence of sin?
- How can you prevent this sequence from occurring in your life?
- How are temptation and sin connected?
- Read James 1:15. What thoughts come to your mind?
- Read James 1:17-18 and circle the descriptive words James uses. What comes to your mind when you read these words? What makes them different from the words he used in previous verses?



Upward and Outward Focus (Telescope)

How does the Scripture affect your relationship with God and others? You experience God's Word in action as you use it to direct your journey with Him and those around you. Answer the following questions and record the answers in your journal.

- Take some time to listen to the Lord about the text you just studied. How did these verses help deepen your love for God?

- As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate this love to others?



Using My *FireBible*

Read the study notes for the following verses in the Fire-Bible and answer the accompanying questions.

- James 1:13. Write in your own words the difference between trials and temptations.

- James 1:14. What happens when you follow the pull of your human desire?

- James 1:15. Why do you think James uses the analogy of the birthing process to describe the path to spiritual destruction?

- What happens if you do not break this process?

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