

*Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

**Who is to Blame?  
James 1:13-18  
Part One**

We have been considering various tests of living faith. The very first test that we have considered in this epistle is the “Response To Trials Test” in vv. 2-12. And what is the proper response to trials? The answer is perseverance. Not a gritting your teeth and getting yourself through kind of persevering but rather a perseverance in loving God. We saw this in v. 12.

We also looked at various factors listed in these verses that work together to produce this kind of perseverance.

First and foremost we need to set our affection on things above rather than on things of earth in vv. 9-11

If this factor were present, hopefully it would lead us to have a strategic and sincere prayer life in vv. 5-8

Which would hopefully contribute to an understanding mind in vv. 3-4.

Which hopefully, over time, would result in a joyous attitude in the midst of trials which we find in verse 2.

A joyful attitude in the midst of trials is not only possible for us as believers, it is expected as a clear and dramatic evidence of our biblical persevering. And I hope that there is not a single one of you here this weekend that will be satisfied with anything less than this.

What is the proper response to trials? Perseverance! A preserving in loving God which expresses itself in obedience, such as counting it all joy when we fall into various trials! But James is not satisfied with just talking about the potential upside of trials. He also wants to address the potential downside of trials. Let us read **James 1:13-18**, “**Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. (14) But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. (15) Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. (16) Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. (17) Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. (18) In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.”** Not only can trials lead to triumph, those very same trials can also lead to temptation. Every difficult thing that comes into our lives will either strengthen us or tempt us; tempt us to doubt God, deny or disobey His Word, to do that which is expedient but not necessarily which is righteous.

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You may have failed your last math test. If, after failing that test you recognize the big picture of things and know that God may be using this failure to spur you on to perhaps developing greater personal discipline you will be able to count it all joy. But if you find yourself being drawn to anger and entertaining the thoughts of, inwardly or outwardly, criticizing the teacher and the principal and the local superintendent and the whole of the educational system, you have begun to experience the very worst of what can happen when trials come into our lives. You have fallen into temptation.

I am confident that there is no one in this room who can stand up this weekend and say I have never been tempted to evil. I am confident that there is no one in this room this weekend who can say I never felt drawn to do that which is sin. There is a wrong and right way for a believer to respond to trials. Hopefully we will consistently turn those trials into triumphs, but there will be certain occasion in our lives when they rather lead to temptation. But where do we place the blame for that temptation?

Typically it is God that receives the blame for temptation. Not that God is specifically accused of such a thing but He is frequently implicated indirectly. Let us look at **Gen. 3**. This chapter contains the story of the fall of man. In the midst of this story, after Adam and Eve had both transgressed God's law, we find them hiding from God in the trees. And it says in **v. 9** **“Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”** And Adam responds, **“I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.”** And the Lord said to him **“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”** Now listen to Adam's response, **“The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.”** Yes, Adam was tempted to disobey God's law and in fact, he did transgress God's law, but how does Adam seek to minimize his blame? By introducing others into the equation. First of all he introduces his wife. **“The woman ..... gave me from the tree, and I ate.”** But God also is blamed. Look again at the verse, **“The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.”** If you had not given me my wife, then everything would have been fine. Eve basically does the same thing. God says to her, **“What is this you have done?”** And Eve responds, **“The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”** Though she doesn't say what Adam said she in effect did the same thing. When we begin to blame the circumstances or situations we are in for how we respond we are indirectly blaming God. God is the one who has given us our husbands, God is the one who has given us our wives, God is the one who has given us our children, God is one who has given us our boss, God is the one who ultimately controls all our circumstances.

Every circumstance of life, whether it is pleasant or painful, provides us with a decision. In fact it requires a decision. Will we, in these circumstances, these testings, these trials, persevere in loving God by being obedient to His Word and grow personally stronger or will we find out ourselves tempted to evil and fall into acts of sin. And, if we in fact do this and respond improperly to the trials in our lives, who is to blame?

James in **vv. 13-18** wants to make sure that we do not in any way blame God for our bad choices. And he gives to us five different proofs.

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### THE NATURE OF EVIL

Let us read v. 13 **“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”** The gods of the world of that day certainly were seen as being able to be tempted and also very involved in the tempting of others. Of course these so-called gods were the creation of the minds of fallen man or fallen demons. And because they were the product of fallenness they manifested the same corruption from which they came. They were corrupt because their creators were corrupt. But though evil had some power over the so-called gods of ancient times, it certainly has no power over the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is perfectly separated from sin and is therefore perfectly holy.

In **Lev.19:2** it says, **“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”** Zeus may not have been holy but the God of the Bible is.

In **Lev.20:26** it says to the nation of Israel, **“Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy....”**

In **Is.6:3** we see the whole of the seraphim (most likely a particular type of angelic being who are continually in the presence of God) crying out what? **“Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.”** God’s holiness cannot be penetrated by sin.

Evil, which is represented in the Scripture as darkness, is darkness at its very core, in its essence, in its nature and therefore UNABLE to effect light because darkness and light are antithetical. They cannot co-exist. And because God is light no darkness can or will ever be found in Him. In **1John 1:5** it says, **“And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.”**

God is unable to be tempted to evil and therefore it would seem totally unthinkable to think that He would be therefore able to tempt anyone. And this is exactly what the Bible teaches. Let us look at the end of v. 13 **“.... and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”** There is only one passage that might be understood as God tempting someone in all of the Bible and that is found in **2 Sam. 24:1**. I will read this verse from the NIV, **“Again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.”** This was a sinful act on the part of David and this is clearly acknowledged by him in v. 10 of this same chapter. It would appear from this verse that God is clearly identified as the “tempter” or “inciter.” But fortunately the Lord in His mercy has also given us **1Chron. 21:1**. So let us read this verse, **“Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.”**

When we put these two passages together I believe it becomes clear what in fact happened. Satan was the tempter. And just as God permitted Satan to approach Job, he permitted Satan to approach David. Certainly God’s permission ultimately resulted in David having to make a choice of whether to respond or not to respond to the enticement of Satan, but the enticement did not come in any direct sense from God.

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In fact every circumstance of our lives certainly comes to us directly or indirectly through God. There is nothing that we experience that doesn't first of all pass through the hands of God. But we must understand that whatever God permits to come into our lives in respect to trial comes to us in order to strengthen us and certainly not to hurt or harm us. But those trials can certainly fail to accomplish this if we do not make good choices.

It is very difficult for the proud human heart to recognize its own failure. When people fall into temptation, when they are being drawn to do evil, they may seek to directly or indirectly implicate God. James is giving us a number of different proofs in these verses to show that this is impossible. The first proof is the nature of evil. Evil by its very nature cannot have any effect on God just as darkness cannot have any effect on light. Therefore, it is impossible for God to be tempted by evil or to tempt others to evil.

### The Nature Of Man

Let us read v. 14, “**But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.**” We are not tempted by God but, rather, we are tempted when we are carried away or enticed by our own lust.

The word “lust” (EPITHUMIA) denotes a strong desire which can be either good or bad. It is used of a good desire in **Luke 22:15, Phil. 1:23 and 1 thess. 2:17**. But in the majority of passages it refers to those desires and emotions of the natural man which tend toward things which are evil. And that is the way it is used here.

The normal desires of life were given to us by God and, of themselves, are not sinful. Without these desires, we could not function. Unless we felt hunger and thirst, we would never eat and drink, and we would die. Without fatigue, the body would never rest and would eventually wear out. Sex is a normal desire; without it the human race would not continue.

It is when we want to satisfy these desires in ways outside God's will that we get into trouble. Eating is normal; gluttony is sin. Sleep is normal; laziness is sin. **Heb. 13:4** says, “Marriage is honorable among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

Some people try to become “spiritual” by denying these normal desires, or by seeking to suppress them; but this only makes them less than human. These fundamental desires of life are the steam in the boiler that makes the machinery go. Turn off the steam and you have no power. Let the steam go its own way and you have destruction. The secret is in CONSTANT CONTROL. These desires must be our servants and not our masters; and this we can do through Jesus Christ. And apart from Him and our yieldedness to Him our fleshly desires will rage out of control.

Satan knows this. And he is in the business of tempting us by putting bait in front of us that will corrupt our natural, normal and healthy desires. By putting in front of us situations and circumstances that call out to our flesh to satisfy itself, but in ungodly and unbiblical ways.

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Look at the words in v. 14, **“But each one is tempted (effectively solicited to evil) when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.”**

**“Carried away”** (EXELKOMENOS) is a metaphor from hunting, speaking of how beasts are drawn away from their place of safety into various traps by the use of bait.

**“Enticed”** (DELEAZOMENOS) is a metaphor or picture from fishing. It conveys the picture of catching with bait. It depicts the juicy worm being dangled in front of the fish. His inner craving to appropriate it for himself prompts him to bite, but he is deceived and caught. Instead of enjoying the anticipated pleasure, he is caught on the hook concealed within.

What pulls us so strongly to the bait. Is it God? No! Is it Satan? No! Satan may bait the hook, His demons may bait the hook, the world may bait the hook but what pulls us to the trap? It is our own LUST, our own natural and healthy desires that have gotten out of control.

### CONCLUSION

This epistle was written so that we might know whether or not we are a part of the family of God. The very first test that is given is the “Response To Trials Test.” The proper response to trials is Perseverance. A continuing, persistent desire on our part to express our abiding love for the Lord even in the midst of the most trying circumstances. The improper response to trials test is to allow our lives to be flooded with temptation.

If this in fact happens, James is seeking to make sure that we in no way blame God for our failure to respond properly to the trials that he allows to come into our lives. In order to accomplish this he gives five proofs.

The Nature of Evil - Evil cannot in any way influence or effect God. Evil is antithetical to the holiness of God. Evil in its essence is darkness while God is light. Therefore God cannot be tempted with evil and neither will He tempt any man. But James does not only point out the nature of evil as a proof he turns to the nature of man.

The Nature of Man - Man’s natural fleshly desires can be corrupted to express themselves sinfully. This is accomplished when those fleshly desires are no longer controlled by Christ and can be baited to fulfill themselves in sinful ways.

How are we to respond to trials? With perseverance. We are, in each and every situation, to be looking to please God by bringing our response in subjection to God’s Word.