

• *James - a guide to holiness and spiritual restoration*

• *Trials and temptations*

• *2-12 troubles*  
• *13-27 temptations*

• *Outline*

**1. Five stages of sin and destruction**

(i) *Temptation*

• *Is a mixture of suggestion plus desire plus pressure*

• *Is not sin - conscience needs to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit*

• *Does not come from God*

• *When desire pressurizes in a wrong direction*

The letter of James is a guide to holiness and spiritual restoration. These Christians are ‘respectable backsliders’. James wants them to recover and to come to great maturity. They are at present weak Christians. They are moral and respectable, but they have many weaknesses, especially ill-treating the poor. If they are to recover they have to be able to face trials and temptations. James has said something about troubles<sup>☞1</sup>. Now he speaks about temptations<sup>☞2</sup>.

How you handle temptation determines how great you are as a Christian. God’s way of advancing our spirituality is suffering<sup>☞1</sup>. There are two main kinds of adversity: trouble and temptation. In James 1:2–12 James is dealing with troubles. In verses 13 onwards he deals with temptations.

This part of James unfolds as follows.

James 1:13–17. How temptation works.

James 1:18. What God gives to defeat temptation: new birth.

James 1:20–25. Defeating temptation by the Word of God.

James 1:26–27. Tests of whether you have defeated temptation.

**1. Consider, first, James’ five stages of sin and destruction.**

(i) First there is **temptation**<sup>☞1</sup>. ‘When being tempted, no-one should say “God is tempting me”. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone<sup>☞2</sup>, but each one is tempted when he is being stimulated and enticed by his own evil desire<sup>☞3</sup>’.

There is a difference between trials and temptations. Trials come from outside of us; temptations come from inside. Trials may not involve any sin<sup>☞1</sup>; temptation can lead to sin. Trials cannot be avoided; temptations can be reduced. Trials are not resistible; temptations are resistible. Trials come from time to time; temptation is present constantly.

What is temptation? It is a mixture of suggestion plus desire, plus pressure upon you that comes from the desire. ‘Suggestion’ is the idea being put to you. The suggestion may not be tempting at all. Suggestion and desire together make temptation. If there is no desire, there is no temptation. Our desires get out of control (desire for glory, self-esteem, for security, possessions, for independence rather than submission, self-will, desires towards impurity).

Temptation is not sin. Weakness of conscience may lead us to be too fearful. The Romans thought they had to be vegetarians<sup>☞1</sup> or to keep Jewish holy days. The Corinthians were fearful of eating meat bought at a butcher’s shop<sup>☞3</sup>. Some people had forbidden marriage (1 Timothy 4:3–4). Conscience needs to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

Temptation does not come from God. Sin often seems to be permitted by God, but we must not read God’s permission into the situation when sin seems to be very easy. The devil can arrange circumstances! No, each one is tempted when he is being stimulated and enticed by his own evil desire<sup>☞1</sup>. We sometimes think God has led us into what is sin. If some sinful situation comes to you ‘accidentally’, you might think God did it. But God cannot tempt. We sometimes think we can get God to help us in some sin. But God cannot be tempted.

When desire is pressurizing you in a wrong direction, you are facing temptation. It might be desire for undeserved glory, or for self-centred glory, desire to be superior, desire to deceive. Haman in Esther chapter 5:9–13 desired to be admired. There can be desire for money, possessions, security. Read about Ahab in 1 Kings 21:1–6. There can be desire for what another

☞1 1:2-12  
☞2 1:13-25

☞1 see Acts 14:22

☞1 1:13-14

☞2 1:13  
☞3 1:14

☞1 see for example, Job 1:16

☞1 Romans 14:2  
☞2 Romans 14:5  
☞3 1 Corinthians 10:25  
☞4 1 Timothy 4:3-4

☞1 1:14

person has, jealousy, desire for revenge, desire to punish. There can be desire to do without God, to save oneself, to be self-righteous, self-sufficient, self-centred. When these things pull us and attract us we are facing severe temptation.

**(ii) Conception**

- The suggestion welcomed

(ii) The next stage is **conception**. ‘Then, after desire has conceived...’ <sup>☞1</sup>. This is when you yield to temptation, when you welcome the suggestion, when the idea is played with. Then it gets a grip on you. It produces blindness, foolishness, passion. This is still not sin, but it is difficult to throw off temptation at this stage. But you can still back away and not sin.

<sup>☞1</sup> 1:15

**(iii) Sin itself**

(iii) The third stage is **sin**. ‘Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin ...’ This is when you do something you ought not to do, or you refuse something you ought to do. Or you sin in the imagination. You give in to a suggestion that you sin and it gets a grip on you because you have given the temptation freedom – and then you sin.

**(iv) Growth of sin**

- A habit - bondage

(iv) Next is the **growth** of sin. Desire ‘... gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown, gives birth to death’<sup>☞1</sup>. The sin becomes a habit. You do it again and again. It is growing more powerful and more common in your life. Sin without repentance grows; it develops. It sets up a bondage<sup>☞2</sup>.

<sup>☞1</sup> 1:15  
<sup>☞2</sup> see John 8:34; Romans 6:16

**(v) Spiritual death**

- Separation from God

(v) The last stage is spiritual **death**. Sin ‘... full-grown, gives birth to death’<sup>☞1</sup>. Death is spiritual insensitivity, godlessness, living without God, separation from God. It begins in this life; and (unless there is some kind of intervention) it goes on for ever. It ruins and destroys.

<sup>☞1</sup> 1:15

**2. The danger of self-deception**



2. **Consider, next, the danger of self-deception.** James says, ‘Make no mistake about it, my beloved brothers and sisters’<sup>☞1</sup>.

<sup>☞1</sup> 1:16

James comes back to his point that God does not tempt. Sometimes you are not sure whether some temptation or trial comes from God or the devil. So James says: ‘Don’t be deceived...’. God will only give good things. It is alright to want things, but God will only give what is good. He meets our needs. He provides food, clothing, companionship, love, shelter, safety, purpose for our lives. He hears prayer. Psalm 65:2 speaks of ‘you who hear prayer ...’. He rewards us when we seek him<sup>☞1</sup>. His grace is bigger than our sins<sup>☞2</sup>. He cares for us<sup>☞3</sup>. He promises to hear us<sup>☞4</sup>. Every time we are tempted it is because we are fearing that somehow we shall lose something. But if we are gripped with the conviction that God is good to us, we need not fear that our desires will be unsatisfied. God has ways of satisfying us and of meeting all of our needs.

<sup>☞1</sup> Hebrews 11:6  
<sup>☞2</sup> Romans 5:20  
<sup>☞3</sup> 1 Peter 5:7  
<sup>☞4</sup> Matthew 7:7, 8, 11; 21:22; John 14:14; 16:14

- God has ways of satisfying us and of meeting all of our needs

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