

We find the “crown of life” also in the book of Revelation:

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev 2:10)

What does the “crown of life” represent? One writer notes:

...the crown of life is the emblem, not of royalty, but of highest joy and gladness, of glory and immortality.¹

Thus the “crown of life” may be reminiscent of the crown or wreath given to the athlete who won the race. Such a “crown” wilted and faded away, but the “crown of life” is a metaphor of having run the race with perseverance, not “giving up” but enduring to the finish line and thus entering into dwelling forever with our Savior, Yeshua.

...which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. – Here James teaches us another very important lesson. The primary motivation by which we persevere in our faith is love for God. For He has given us not only new life, but He has also given us the deep desire to love Him for all that He has done for us. When we contemplate the infinite value of Yeshua’s death on our behalf, we are given both the desire and, by the indwelling Ruach (Spirit), the ability to love Him to the end.

We love *Him*, because He first loved us. (1John 4:19)

The majority of early Greek manuscripts do not have “Lord” in this phrase² which is undoubtedly because James expects his readers to have the previous context in mind. There he introduced the teaching that believers should recognize the good in a variety of trials that come upon them because such trials are used of the Lord to build spiritual strength which enables endurance or perseverance in the faith. Further, when such trials are experienced and one needs greater wisdom, James instructs us to “ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach” (v. 5). Thus, the subject of this final clause in v. 12 is clearly “the Lord,” for He is the One Who not only gives wisdom and strength to persevere through trials, but also rewards those who are shown to be His through their persevering faith. It is understandable, then, why

1 R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1973), p. 80.

2 ϣ²³ Ⲙ A B Ψ 81.

some of the manuscripts (mostly the later ones) add “Lord” (ὁ κύριος, *ho kurios*)¹ and others add “God” (ὁ θεός, *ho theos*).²

Note also that James identifies true believers as those “who love Him,” i.e., those who love the Lord. The use of “love” to describe a genuine believer’s relationship with God goes back to the Shema (Deut 6:4–5) and becomes a common expression throughout the Scriptures.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deut 6:4–5)

In fact, to “love the Lord” is a hallmark phrase in Deuteronomy being found seven other times³ to describe the covenant relationship between God and Israel. This was a pattern in Ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties, in which “love” was used to describe the covenant bond.⁴ The primary thing we learn from this “love language” is that one’s genuine love for the Lord is seen by one’s life as it is lived out in obedience and service to Him. Without accompanying actions, a profession to love God is empty and false.

You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments. (Deut 11:1)

It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil. (Deut 11:13–14)

in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. (Deut 30:16)

1 ο (- C) κύριος C P 0246 **ⲙ** sy^h

2 4. 33^{vid.} 323. 945. 1241. 1739 *al* vg sy^p

3 Deut 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16.

4 See D. R. Hillers, “Treaty Terminology” in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research (BASOR)*, 176 (1964), pp. 46–47.

Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (Josh 22:5)

This same emphasis is taught by Yeshua and His apostles as well:

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. (Jn 14:15)

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him. (John 14:21)

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom 13:10)

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1Jn 4:20)

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. (1Jn 5:2)

If, as we have shown, loving God is seen to be genuine and real only when our lives are characterized by obedience to Him, it would seem that James might have written "...which the Lord has promised to those who obey Him." What do we learn from the fact that he wrote "...those who love Him"?

First, we can understand the import of James' use of the word "love" here since it is so often used in the Scriptures as the mark of those whom God has redeemed. Second, love is the fountain from which obedience flows, for when we truly love someone, we do all in our power to please them and do for them that which is good and right. Living righteously to honor and obey God proceeds from a heart that sincerely loves Him. Third, love is that which motivates and gives strength to persevere in a promised relationship. Since the primary focus of this opening paragraph in the Epistle of James emphasizes the need to persevere when trials come upon us, he here emphasizes "love for God" as that which enables the believer to "keep on keeping on," to remain faithful to God and strong in faith even in the midst of trials.

Note another important truth that James emphasizes here: God

promises His eternal blessings (“the crown of life”) only to those who are truly His, that is, those who love Him. The same terminology is used by Paul in Rom 8:28.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Rom 8:28)

But in the following verses, Paul explains to us the very means by which sinners come to love God, for the next verse, v. 29, begins with the word “For.”

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Rom 8:29–30)

Here we understand more fully how James uses the word “promise” in our verse when he writes “...which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” How could God promise the “crown of life” to anyone if their salvation ultimately depended upon their own choices and abilities? But, based upon the Scriptures we know that those who are predestined are called and thus truly come to faith in Yeshua and are therefore justified. Moreover, because of God’s all powerful and ordaining love, all who are justified will be glorified. Surely there is a cooperation between the believer and God, for we must persevere; we must remain faithful, and we must “count it all joy” when encountering various trials. But we do so as God enables and strengthens us to persevere and to love Him to the end. Persevere we must; persevere we will!

13–14 Let no one say when he is tested, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

Note that in the opening phrase of v. 13 I have changed the English of the NASB from “temped” to “tested.”¹ As noted earlier, the Greek word *πειράζω* (*peirazō*) can carry both the idea of “testing” as well as

1 Note the Christian Standard Bible (CSB, formerly HCSB) translation of v. 13: “No one undergoing a trial should say, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself doesn’t tempt anyone.”

that of “tempting.” Since it is clear that James is continuing the subject of how the believer is to bear up under trials (v. 4), it seems best to translate the opening phrase of our verse with “tested” rather than “tempted,” since in the previous context it seems clear that such trials are external and God is the One Who may bring such external “trials” or “testing” upon His children for their good and spiritual growth. We see an example of this in Genesis 22 when God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”
(Gen 22:1)

Note that the Lxx uses the language as in our verse, utilizing the Greek *πειράζω* (*peirazō*) – ὁ θεὸς ἐπείραξεν τὸν Ἀβραάμ (“God tested Abraham.”)

“*I am being tempted by God*” – Now James goes on to describe temptations that are internal, that is, those that arise from the sinful nature which remains in the believer and must be constantly overcome and subdued. When, in the midst of “various trials,” one could give in to the weakness of the flesh and begin to wonder why God would allow such testing. To entertain such a perspective is the first step to questioning the goodness of God. Thus James warns us here not to be swayed by the sinful flesh but to recognize the source of such thinking and reject it as contrary to all that we, as believers in Yeshua, know to be true.

To fall prey to the sinful nature is precisely what happened with Adam and Chavah. Instead of accepting that they had sinned and that their sin preceded from their own hearts, ultimately Adam blamed God, for it was God Who gave him Chavah.

The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate. (Gen 3:12).

...*for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.* – James is not here entering into the full debate over the so-called “problem of evil” which tries to answer the question of “how did evil enter into the world?” What James is categorically asserting is that God is not the source of evil but that “in his holiness God stands far above evil and cannot be influenced by it.”¹

1 Kistemaker, *James*, p. 48.

Here we see James affirming the attribute of God’s holiness. He cannot be tempted by evil because He is infinitely and eternally holy. He has no weakness whatsoever because He is infinite in His power (omnipotent). As such, He is never tempted by evil, for by His very nature He cannot sin. Only a being who is able to sin is susceptible to temptation.

Nor does He ever tempt anyone to sin, for to do so would also be contrary to the infinite holiness of His being. Some may object because it may seem the Scriptures teach differently, that God gives some people over to sinful passions (Rom 1:25-32). But what the Scriptures teach is that God may allow depraved mankind to go their own way, that is, to be who they are as controlled by the sinful nature. But such depravity does not have its source in God Who is holy. Rather the Scriptures teach that sin came into the world through Adam:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned... (Rom 5:12)

Therefore, as we face various trials in life, we must stand against any thought that springs forth from our sinful nature which would cause us to question the goodness and holiness of God. In all things, God is holy and will maintain all of His promises to those who are His, that is, “those who love Him.”

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. – Here James specifies the true source of sin, which is the sinful nature. It is the remaining corruptions of the sinful nature, the flesh, that wants to yield to sin. James describes the sinful nature as “lust” (ἐπιθυμία, *epithumia*). The Greek word *epithumia* can be used to describe both good desires¹ and evil desires. The majority of times that this word is used in the Apostolic Scriptures, it describes sinful desires, i.e., the pull of the flesh to do that which is contrary to God’s righteousness.

The participles “carried away and enticed” describe what the sinful nature is capable of if given into it. “Carried away” (ἐξέλκω, *exelkō*) could just as correctly be translated as “dragged away”² and “enticed”

1 E.g., Phil 1:23 where Paul describes his desire to “depart and be with Messiah.” See also Lk 22:15, the words of Yeshua: “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

2 BDAG, “ἐξέλκω,” p. 347.

(*δελεάζω, deleazō*) carries the sense of “enticed” or “lured” into a trap.¹ Thus, the child of God must constantly be “putting to death” the deeds of the flesh and progressing in being sanctified more and more unto God. As Paul writes:

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom 5:5–8)

The practical application of what James is teaching us here is obvious, and Paul’s words are clearly applicable as well. If we are to constantly win the battle over the sinful flesh, we must remain ever faithful in the means of grace. These are: filling our minds with the word of God and living in accordance to its eternal truths; regularly engaging in prayer and communion with God; and the fellowship of other believers as we together encourage one another to be living testimonies of God’s love and grace. Clearly, that which we feed upon, that is, what is regularly filling our minds and thoughts, will have a large effect on our ability to say “no” to the flesh and “yes” to God as we are led by His Holy Spirit.

1 BDAG, “*δελεάζω*,” p. 217. It is found in non-biblical texts of the fisherman luring the fish into his catch.