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JAMES 1:18: CREATION AND REDEMPTION

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Opening up a systematic theology book, one would be unlikely to find columns of references to the Epistle of James in the index. The epistle is not known for its intricately woven theology. Instead it is prized for its clearly articulated ethics. When James *has* been the topic of theological discussion, the discussion of faith and works seems to crowd out any other subject. In fact, it is when James does theology, that his apparent contradiction to Paul's doctrine of justification by faith is condemned and his writing deemed an "epistle of straw." James does, however, engage in constructive and *orthodox* theological thought, although he does maintain an ethical focus. Karl Barth, states that at least one "glorious saying" in James "ought to have been enough in itself to prevent Luther from calling James an "epistle of straw."<sup>1</sup> That saying is James 1:18, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (RSV). What would cause Barth to reverse the sentence spoken over James by Luther? Barth appraises:

This is what Christendom and every Christian is in terms of what he may have before others in his own personal life in virtue of his vocation. He is a firstborn of God's creatures, a first-fruits reaped and gathered from the field of the world. He is truly great as such.<sup>2</sup>

James 1:18 densely gives James' opinion of where man stands in relationship to God as his creator and redeemer and the rest of creation.

#### CREATION OR REDEMPTION?

F. J. A. Hort, in his posthumously published commentary, outlined the various interpretations of the verse based on the referent ἡμᾶς: Does ἡμᾶς refer to men and women as recipients of God's word of creation? Israel as recipients of God's word of revelation? Or Christians as recipients of the Gospel?<sup>3</sup> That ἡμᾶς can be interpreted in three discrete ways is a testament to the dense theological language that James uses in this verse.

James introduces the verse, "Of his own will" (βουληθεῖς). Meaning "to plan on a course of action," βουλόμαι is used of both man and God, though θέλω is more common in reference to deity.<sup>4</sup> James, however, makes no such distinction between θέλω and βουλόμαι, as he uses the latter for the deliberation of both God (1:18; 4:15) and man (2:20; 3:4; 4:4). That creation is the result of the active will of God is seen in the Psalms, as God "makes whatever he wills" (πάντα ὅσα ἠθέλησεν ἐποίησεν; Ps 115:2 [LXX 113:11]; 135:6 [LXX 134:6]). Later, the author of the

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (vol. 4/3.2 of *Church Dogmatics*; ed. G. W. Bromiley; trans./ed. T. F. Torrance; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1962), 675.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> F. J. A. Hort, *The Epistle of St James* (London: Macmillan, 1909), 31–35.

<sup>4</sup> BDAG, "βουλόμαι," n.p. *Bible Works for Windows*. Version 6.0.003s. 2003.

Wisdom of Solomon asks, “How could anything have continued if you had not willed it?” (πῶς δὲ διέμεινεν ἄν τι εἰ μὴ σὺ ἠθέλησας; 11:25). Hort states that βουληθεῖς refers back to Gen 1:26, where God deliberates, “Let us make man in our own image.”<sup>5</sup> In the NT, the elders of John’s Apocalypse declare that it was “through the will” (διὰ τὸ θέλημα) of God that creation “existed and was created” (σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν).<sup>6</sup> Elliott-Binns, however, admits that the above citations do not necessitate βουληθεῖς referring to God’s willful creation of man, given that redemption can also be “of the will of God.”<sup>7</sup> John 1:12–13 bares remarkable similarity to the thought of James: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born (ἐγεννήθησαν), not of blood nor of the will (θελήματος) of the flesh nor of the will (θελήματος) of man, but of God.” The concept is repeated in Eph 1:5, “He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will” (κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ). Given the lexical background above, the deliberate will of God precipitates both creation *and* redemption.

It was the will of the Father of lights to *give birth* (ἀπεκύησεν) to us. Ἀποκύω occurs in the New Testament only here and v. 15, signalling that in the immediate context, James is contrasting God’s deliberate birthing of the community to sin’s birthing of death. The feminine image of God giving birth is common in the Old Testament: God asks if he had “conceived” (הרה) or had “given birth to” (דל) Israel (Num 11:12), while in Deut 32:18 YHWH is directly referred to as “the God who gave birth to [Israel]” (אֱלֹהֵינוּ לָא). Ropes rejects that ἀπεκύησεν can refer to creation, because creation is never “birthed” in the OT, and it is much more natural to associate it with the “re-birth” of redemption (see above John 1:13; 3:3–8; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7, 8; 5:1, 4; Titus 3:5).<sup>8</sup> Of particular interest is 1 Peter 1:3 and 23. Peter declares that by God’s great mercy we have been “born anew” (ἀναγεννήσας; v. 3), while in v. 23, he informs his readers that they “have been born anew (ἀναγεγεννημένοι), not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God (διὰ λόγου ζῶντος θεοῦ καὶ μένοντος).” He expounds upon the quality of this “living and abiding word of God” by quoting from Isaiah 40:7–8 LXX, “The grass withers, And the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord abides forever” (v. 24–25). He further identifies this word as the “the word which was preached to you” (τὸ ῥῆμα τὸ εὐαγγελισθὲν εἰς ὑμᾶς). The parallels between this passage and the setting of James 1:18 are striking. Both James (1:11) and 1 Peter quote from Isaiah 40:7–8, and while

<sup>5</sup> Hort, *James*, 33.

<sup>6</sup> L. E. Elliott-Binns, “James 1.18: Creation or Redemption?” *NTS* 3 (1957): 148–161.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>8</sup> James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1916), 166–167.

Peter finishes the Isaiah's description of fading flowers and withering grass with the contrasting endurance of God's word, James does not mention God's "word" until 1:18, in a context of God's giving birth! Peter mirrors James' line of thought in the following context, as he admonishes his readers to "put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander," and "Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk" (1 Pet 2:1-2). While James admonishes his readers to "put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (1:21). Such parallels would seem to indicate that James had in clear view the same "new birth" that was enacted by God by the "word that was preached."<sup>9</sup>

As Ropes mentioned there is only a hint of birthing language in OT being used for creation, where it refers to the mountains being "born" (תָּבַר; Ps 90:2). Philo, however, writes, "knowledge having received the seed of God, when the day of her travail arrived, brought forth (ἀπεκύησε) her only and well-beloved son, perceptible by the external senses, namely this world" (*De Ebr.* 30).<sup>10</sup> So, while *not* stating that God gave birth to creation, Philo *does* associate creation with the image of birthing. Elliott-Binns also mentions a citation from the *Tanhuma* on Exodus 4:12, where God tells Moses, "I am making you into a new creature, as in the case of a woman who conceives (*horah*) and gives birth."<sup>11</sup> Hence ἀπεκύησεν is a metaphor of both God's creative acts and his redemption of Israel and the Church.

James' community is given birth by a word of truth (λόγω ἀληθείας). Hort contends that the absence of the articles with λόγω ἀληθείας indicates that James was not speaking of revelation,<sup>12</sup> but elsewhere admits that the omission of articles is common in cases where brevity is necessary.<sup>13</sup> The anarthrous λόγος ἀληθείας in Psalm 119:43 (LXX 118:43) and *Test. Gad* 3:1 stands for the law, while in Prov 22:21, Eccl 12:10 and the *Pss. Sol.* 16:10 it means "truthful speech" in a context of wisdom. Λόγος ἀληθείας in 2 Cor 6:7 *most likely* refers to the Gospel, while with the article, the Gospel is clearly the referent (Eph 1:13, Col 1:5 and 2 Tim 2:15). Thus,

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<sup>9</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, identifies Isaiah's "word of the Lord" with James' "word of truth" based on 1 Peter's quotation. See *The Letter of James* (AB 37A; New York:Doubleday, 1995), 191.

<sup>10</sup> Elliott-Binns, 151. All translations of Philo by Charles D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Elliott-Binns, 150. Translation from John T. Townsend, *Midrash Tanhuma* (2 vols.; Hoboken, N. J.: KTAV, 1989), 2:16.

<sup>12</sup> Hort, *James*, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Elliott-Binns (152) notes Hort's own comments on διασπορᾶς in 1 Pet 1:1 (*The First Epistle of St Peter* [London: Macmillan, 1998], 15).

Mayor contends that λόγος ἀληθείας was a *vox technica* for the Gospel in early Christianity and rejects that it could refer to creation.<sup>14</sup>

While it is certainly plausible that James has the Gospel in mind (see above discussion of 1 Peter), contrary to Mayor, creation could also be in mind. The creative divine fiat is a common theme in both Judaism and Christianity. Referring to the Genesis account, the psalmist writes:

By the word of the LORD (τῷ λόγῳ) the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth (τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ)...he spoke (εἶπεν), and it came to be; he commanded (ἐνετείλατο), and it stood forth (Psalm 33:6–9 RSV; see also 148:5).<sup>15</sup>

In intertestamental literature creation exists by God's word as well. Aseneth declares in her prayer of confession, "you, Lord, spoke and they were brought to life, because your word, Lord, is life for all your creatures" (σύ, κύριε, εἶπας καὶ πάντα γεγονάσι, καὶ ὁ λόγος ὁ σὸς ζωὴ ἐστὶν πάντων σου τῶν κτισμάτων; *Jos. Asen.* 12:3).<sup>16</sup> While, in a hymn of praise Judith declares, "thou didst speak, and they were made" (σου...εἶπας καὶ ἐγενήθησαν; 16:14). God's creative word also forms the ground for Solomon's prayer for wisdom:

O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who hast made all things by thy word (ἐν λόγῳ σου), and by thy wisdom (τῇ σοφίᾳ σου) hast formed man, to have dominion over the creatures thou hast made (σοῦ γενομένων κτισμάτων), and rule the world in holiness and righteousness, and pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul, give me the wisdom that sits by thy throne, and do not reject me from among thy servants (*Wis. Sol.* 9:1–4 RSV)

This passage is of particular importance because God's λόγος and his σοφία are both the means of his creating man and the rest of creation. The New Testament also speaks of God's creative word. The classical texts are John 1:3, where "all things were made through [the Word], and without [the word] was not anything made that was made" (RSV), and Hebrews 11:3, where it is stated that "the world was created by the word of God" (κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ).<sup>17</sup>

We are created "in order that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creation" (εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἀπαρχὴν τινὰ τῶν αὐτοῦ κτισμάτων). The LXX uses ἀπαρχή to translate תְּשִׁבָּע "first,

<sup>14</sup> Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of James* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 63.

<sup>15</sup> Later rabbinic tradition carries on this concept. "By ten Sayings was the world created" (*m. 'Abot* 5:1).

<sup>16</sup> Cited by Friedrich Spitta, *Zur Geschichte und Litteratur des Urchristentums* (2 vols; Gottigen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1896), 1.45. Translation by C. Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth," *OTP* 1:177–247.

<sup>17</sup> See also the Apostolic Fathers: *Herm. Vis.* 1.3.4, 3.3.5; *Ign. Eph.* 15:1.

best, firstfruits” (19x), תרומה “contribution” (39x) and הלב “fat, choicest part” (5x).<sup>18</sup> The ἀπαρχή stood not only for the first in priority, but also the first in quality, dedicated unto God. Metaphorically, Jeremiah described Israel as “holy to the LORD, the first fruits (ἀρχή/ראשית) of his harvest” (2:3).<sup>19</sup> A strikingly similar phrase is used by Philo, who states that God has mercy on Israel because “they have been dedicated to him, the Creator and Father of all, as a sort of first-fruits (τις ἀπαρχή) of the whole human race” (*De Spec. Leg.* 4.180). It is undoubtedly used in a similar metaphorical sense of Christians by Paul in Rom 16:5 and 1 Cor 16:15, where individuals are called the ἀπαρχή of the believers in their geographical locations.<sup>20</sup> In Rev 14:4 the chaste followers of the Lamb are “redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb.” The image of firstfruits picks up eschatological connotations elsewhere in Paul, as Christ is called the ἀπαρχή of those who sleep (1 Cor 15:20, 23) and similarly, the πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν (Col 1:18). Such an eschatological usage is grounded upon the cultic significance of ἀπαρχή—faithfulness in offering God the firstfruits guaranteed the rest of the harvest (Prov 3:9–10). Hence, Christ as the firstfruits of the resurrection guarantees the resurrection the Church. Similarly, Christians are also said to have the firstfruits of the Spirit in Rom 8:23, a guarantee of “the glory which is destined to be disclosed for us” (Rom 8:18). Hence, James’ readers are said to be either chronologically the first of creation or qualitatively the best of creation.

Rabbinic exegesis related the concept of firstfruits closely to creation.<sup>21</sup> Answering the question, “For whose sake did God create heaven and earth?” *Midrash Tanhuma* links God’s creation “in the beginning” (בראשית) with Jeremiah’s description of Israel as the “beginning/firstfruits” (ἀρχή/ראשית) of his harvest (Gen 1:1, Jer 2:3), concluding that God created the world “for the sake of Israel.”<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the same thought lies behind Ezra’s plea,

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<sup>18</sup> On ἀπαρχή in James 1:18, see F. H. Palmer, “James i.18 and the Offering of First-Fruits,” *TynBul* 3 (1957): 1–2.

<sup>19</sup> Later rabbinic exegesis grounded Israel’s cultic practice of offering firstfruits to God’s designation of her as his own firstfruits: “I designated you the first (ראשית קראתי אתכם); wherefore I commanded you concerning the first (על עסקי ראשית הזהרתי אתכם)” (*b. Shabbath* 32a).

<sup>20</sup> The occurrence in 2 Thess 2:13 is debatable, where א D Ψ have ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς instead.

<sup>21</sup> C. F. Burney makes the case that Paul’s reference to Christ as πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως in Col 1:15 is similarly linked to Gen 1:1 by means of connecting it with Prov 8:22, where wisdom was fashioned at the beginning (ראשית) of God’s work (“Christ as the APXH of Creation,” *JTS* 27 [1926]: 160–177).

<sup>22</sup> *Midrash Tanhuma* is an admittedly late work from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, hence Elliott-Binns discounts it as having any bearing on the text (153). It should be noted, however that this shows the striking possibility of linking the concept of firstfruits with creation, and similar reasoning is found in *Lev. Rab.* 36:4 Translation from Townsend, 1:6.

“O LORD, . . . you have said that it was for us that you created the world. . . If the world has indeed been created for us, why do we not possess our world as an inheritance? How long will this be so?” (4 Ezra 6:55–59).<sup>23</sup> Sirach’s “Prayer for Deliverance” (36:1–17 [LXX 36:1–16]) picks up similar themes as well:

Gather all the tribes of Jacob, and give them their inheritance, as at the beginning (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς). Have mercy, O Lord, upon the people called by thy name, upon Israel, whom thou hast likened to a first-born son (πρωτοτόκῳ). . . Bear witness to those whom thou didst create in the beginning (τοῖς ἐν ἀρχῇ κτίσμασίν σου), and fulfil the prophecies spoken in thy name (RSV 36:11–15 [LXX 36:10–14]).

Here the sage refers to Israel as those whom God created at the beginning—literally *in the beginning of his creatures*—and links creation with hopes of the eschatological renewal of the tribes of Jacob. It is important to observe that James addresses his letter ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ (1:1), and concludes it, instructing his readers to imitate Elijah, whom Sirach stated was “to restore the tribes of Jacob” (48:10).<sup>24</sup> James 1:18 is set within an eschatological *inclusio*, that echoes Sirach’s hopes of Israel’s *restoration*—a hope grounded in Israel’s *creation*.

#### GOD—MAN—CREATION: JAMES’ BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

As seen in the discussion above the words penned by James in v. 18 easily evoke images of creation and redemption. So can it be that James has both in mind? One thing that is clearly seen in v. 18 is that James is speaking of his reader’s relationship to both God and to creation. It may be helpful to explore other texts that have this triad, God—man—creation, in mind. It has been asserted that James had the Genesis account in the background of his mind as he penned vv 13–18.<sup>25</sup> James’ reference to the “Father of lights,” evokes the first fiat of the Creator, “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3). God creates the lights in the heavens to “regulate the day and night,” while in vv 26–28 God creates man to “have dominion” over the inhabitants of the earth.

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<sup>23</sup> B. M. Metzger, “The Fourth Book of Ezra,” *OTP* 1:517–559. See also 7:11. Of particular interest is the angel’s response to Ezra, “The Most High made this world for the sake of many, but the world to come for the sake of few” (8:1). The first creation was for the sake of Israel *and* the new creation for the sake of a smaller subset of humanity.

<sup>24</sup> S. Pines denies any eschatological reference in Jas 1:1, given that the twelve tribes are *still* in the dispersion (“Notes on the Twelve Tribes in Qumran, Early Christianity and Jewish Tradition,” in *Messiah and Christos* [TSAJ 32; ed. I. Gruenwald; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992], 151–154). Matt A. Jackson-McCabe, however, counters that 1:1 is an “evocative address that . . . both connotes a present state in which the promises of God remain unfulfilled and, especially in connection with a χριστός, sounds a note of eschatological hope” (“A Letter to the Twelve Tribes in the Diaspora: Wisdom and ‘Apocalyptic’ Eschatology in the Letter of James,” [SBLSP; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1996], 504–517).

<sup>25</sup> Elliott-Binns, 155; Rendall, 63; Hort, *James*, 32.

βουληθείς has been taken to refer to the preceding inner-deliberation of the Creator, and man as ἀπαρχήν τινα τῶν αὐτοῦ κτισμάτων refers to his place of dominion over creation.<sup>26</sup> James' reflection on the creation acknowledges its fallenness. The progression of desire, sin and death (vv. 14–15) echoes the temptation, fall and punishment of Adam and Eve (Gen 3). It is interesting to note that James counter's his reader's faulty assumption that God is the source of sin and temptation by pointing them to the "Father of lights" (v. 16) who "gave birth" to them "by a word of truth" that they could be a "first fruits of his creation" (v. 17). The Psalmist similarly reflects upon the relationship between man, God and creation as he looks upward:

When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet (Psalm 8:3–6).

God as creator is acknowledged by the Psalmist and man's dominion over the earth is a theme that runs parallel with the majesty of the moon and the stars. A similar juxtaposition of the heavenly host and man is made in Psalm 19. The ordered heavens "declare the glory of God" (vv1–7), while the Torah is praised as "perfect" (vv. 8–10), and is shown to serve as the basis of man's ordered life (vv. 11–14). Note that after highlighting man's birthed relation to the Father of lights and his creation, James admonishes his readers to "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save" their souls (v. 21), and likens that word to the "perfect law, the law of liberty" (1:25). Of course, the James' discourse on temptation (1:13–18) is preceded by his teaching on wisdom, a term often synonymous with Torah (1:5).<sup>27</sup>

James' affinity with the teachings of Jesus ben Sirach has already been noted above.<sup>28</sup> Spitta mentions that Sirach's deliberation about the source of man's propensity for evil (15:11–20) underlies much of James' discourse in vv. 13–18. Sir 15:14, which states that God "created man in the beginning (ἐξ ἀρχῆς), and. . . left him in the power of his own inclination," is

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<sup>26</sup> Note that Philo remarks, "We ought, however, not to be ignorant of this also, that it is no proof that because man was the last created animal that he is the lowest in rank, and charioteers and pilots are witnesses of this" (*De Opif.* 29.87).

<sup>27</sup> The connection between the Torah, wisdom and creation was explicitly seen in rabbinic tradition. The *Genesis Rabbah* equates the wisdom of Prov 8:22 with the Torah, and states that the Torah served as God's blueprint of creation, "Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world, while The Torah declares, in the beginning God created (Gen 1:1), Beginning (רֵאשִׁית) referring to the Torah, as in the verse, The Lord made me as the beginning of His way (Prov 8:22)" (*Gen. Rab.* 1:1). See above discussion of the rabbinic linking of בְּרֵאשִׁית in Gen 1:1 with Israel as God's רֵאשִׁית in Jer 2:3.

<sup>28</sup> The similarities of both form and content between James and Sirach have been noted by Richard Bauckham, *James* (New Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1999), 74–83.

analagous to man being created as the firstfruits of creation.<sup>29</sup> One could also link Sirach's injunction "Do not say it was [God] who led me astray (ἐπλάνησεν)" in 15:12 with James' command, "Do not be deceived (Μὴ πλανᾶσθε)" in 1:16. Immediately following Sirach's discussion of man's evil inclination, he recount's God's history of punishment for sinners (16:1–14). He then counters the the sinner's excuse, "I shall be hidden from the Lord" (16:17) by expounding upon the omnipotence of the Creator as seen in the grandeur of his creation (16:18–30). He introduces an exposition of the order of the heavenlies by stating "The works of the Lord have existed from the beginning (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς) by his creation, and when he made them, he determined their division" (16:26). He then describes the orderliness of the heavenlies prior to describing the state of man:

He arranged his works in an eternal order, and their dominion for all generations; they neither hunger nor grow weary, and they do not cease from their labors. They do not crowd one another aside, and they will never disobey his word. After this the Lord looked upon the earth, and filled it with his good things; with all kinds of living beings he covered its surface, and to it they return.

The Lord created man out of earth, and turned him back to it again. He gave to men few days, a limited time, but granted them authority over the things upon the earth. He endowed them with strength like his own, and made them in his own image. He placed the fear of them in all living beings, and granted them dominion over beasts and birds (Sir 16:27–17:4).

The eternal order of the heavens is again juxtaposed with a description of man's relationship with creation.<sup>30</sup> Is it possible that James, in speaking of the "Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" is evoking images of heavenly order, prior to his explanation of man's God-birthed relation to creation? The parallels between Sirach and James are enhanced further as Sirach notes that the the Torah was given to man as a part of his ordered existence, "He bestowed knowledge upon them, and allotted to them the law of life. He established with them an eternal covenant, and showed them his judgments" (17:11–12; cf. Jas 1:25).

Given these parallels between Sirach and James, a creation setting for James 1:18 is readily apparent. Especially given the verse's juxtaposition with the "Father of lights" in v. 17 and the preceding discourse on temptation (vv. 13–15). But as seen above, in the discussion of

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<sup>29</sup> Spitta, 1.54. A detailed exposition of the doctrine of the "evil inclination" is beyond the purview of this paper, but it has been observed that this doctrine is behind James' teaching on temptation. See Wallace I. Wolverson, "The Double-Minded Man in Light of Essene Psychology," *ATR* 38 (1956): 166–175.

<sup>30</sup> Luis Alonso Schökel notes a deliberate comparison between the ordered heavens and the potentially disordered life of man. See "The Vision of Man in Sirach 16:24–17:14," in *Israelite Wisdom* (eds. John G. Gammie, et al; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 235–245.

James' similarities with 1 Peter, the theme of redemption is strong in v. 18 as well. It is clear that both James and Peter quote from Isaiah (Jas 1:9–12; 1 Pet 1:24–25; Isa 40:6–8). Donald Verseput has compared James 1 to 4Q185, another text that quotes Isaiah 40, and sees λόγῳ ἀληθείας of 1:18 as an “echo” of the “word of God” in Isa 40:8.<sup>31</sup> Thus, he correctly asserts that v. 18 is closely tied to vv. 9–12, but he is wrong to deny it any cosmological significance, given the entire content of Isaiah's prophecy. Immediately following Isaiah's description of the enduring word of the Lord, he paints a picture of coming restoration with the colors of creation. The one “who will gather the lambs in his arms,” (v. 11), is the one “who has measured the the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance” (v. 12). Isaiah then condemns the futile idolatry of Israel comparing idols made of created matter to the “the one who sits above the circle of the earth” (vv. 16–22). Next he recapitulates the imagery of withering grass in his description of the judgment of the princes and rulers of the earth (vv. 23–24), and the Holy One asks, “To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him?” (v. 25). He responds to this rhetorical question with a command that sounds like Psalm 8 in the imperative:

Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hid from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God”? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary, his understanding is unsearchable. (40:26–28).

The prophet commands Israel to begin “stargazing,” in order to begin comprehending the majesty of God the creator and redeemer. Isaiah “has not presented his argument in vv. 12–16 as an abstract, independent theology of creation. Rather, the purpose of demonstrating Yahweh's power as *creator* is to legitimate the proclamation. . . that Yahweh is able to come as *redeemer*.”<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that both Isaiah and Sirach respond to the mistake of thinking one can be hidden from God (Sir 16:17; Isa 40:27) with a description of God's grand creation (Isa 40:26–28; Sir 16:18–17:34). Hence, James responds to his communities doubts about the goodness of God, by explaining their relationship to him as the God-born firstfruits of creation.

AN ETHICS OF CREATEDNESS AND THE *IMAGO DEI*

<sup>31</sup> See p. 705 in “4Q185 and the Epistle of James” *JBL* 117 (1998): 691–707.

<sup>32</sup> See p. 141 in Thomas W. Mann, “Stars, Sprouts, and Streams: The Creative Redeemer of Second Isaiah,” in *God Who Creates* (eds. W. P. Brown and S. D. McBride, Jr.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 135–151.

The difficulty in determining whether James intended to have creation or redemption in mind as he penned the words of 1:18 was often the result of a reactionary stance against an opponent's critical or *pre-critical* view of the text. Spitta proposed that James was a pre-Christian, Jewish document, with occasional references to Christ thrown in, hence he made the case that 1:18 could only refer to man's creation.<sup>33</sup> Other commentators (e.g. Mayor) reacted against Spitta's larger claim of a Jewish provenance, and attacked his position on v. 18. Such commentators were right to sense the strong redemptive language of the verse, but often excluded any possible allusion to creation. It is however possible, as seen above, to see both creation and redemption of mankind alluded to in James 1:18. Luke Timothy Johnson remarks:

The impossibility of deciding exclusively for one or the other of these options is precisely the most important point about James's theological perspective: The God who is now at work among them is the same as has always been at work, the one God revealed through creation, through covenant, through gospel.<sup>34</sup>

While the critical assumptions of some commentators have clouded the issue, a strong separation of the concepts of creation and redemption in has also made a contribution to the problem. Christoph Schöbel remarks:

It has been one of the difficulties of ecclesiological thought in the West that this identity of ontological constitution has been obscured by appropriating creation exclusively to the Father and the institution of the church exclusively to the Son, so that creation and redemption appeared to be discontinuous in a sense that has blurred important aspects of the understanding of both creation *and* redemption.<sup>35</sup>

As noted above, James' letter is set within an eschatological *inclusio*. In essence, the letter is an instruction manual on how the "twelve tribes of the dispersion" (1:1) are to act in light of the fact that "the Judge is standing at the doors" (5:9).<sup>36</sup> It is important to note, however, that James does not call Christians the "firstfruits of the *new* creation." Instead, they are the "firstfruits of this *present* creation." He locates his ethics in both eschatological expectation,

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<sup>33</sup> Spitta, 1:151–154.

<sup>34</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, "God Ever New, Ever the Same: The Witness of James and Peter," in *The Forgotten God: Perspectives in Biblical Theology* (A. Andrew Das and Frank J. Matera, eds.; Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 211–227. See 218.

<sup>35</sup> Christoph Schwöbel, "God, Creation and the Christian Community: The Dogmatic Basis of a Christian Ethic of Createdness," in *The Doctrine of Creation* (ed. Colin Gunton; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 149–176. Page 171. Colin Gunton remarks that this is the mistake of Augustine's creation theology (*The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 120).

<sup>36</sup> Patrick J. Hartin, *A Spirituality of Perfection: Faith in Action in the Letter of James* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 52. See also Verseput, who likens James to a "covenantal diaspora epistle." As such, James imparts "instructions to the dispersed people of God in expectation of divine faithfulness" (702–703).

and in the present condition of man within creation. His is an “ethics of createdness.”<sup>37</sup> R. St. John Parry was correct to assert that for James, “Redemption in the strictest sense renews and fulfils the purpose of creation.”<sup>38</sup>

Man as the firstfruits was created as the pinnacle, the best of God’s creation—created in his image (3:9) and given dominion over “every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature” (3:8). It is in living up to his high createdness, that man’s redemption is evidenced. Hence, as beings made in God’s likeness, James calls his readers to imitate God. Sophie Laws has observed two themes in the Epistle of James, “the oneness of the character and activity of God, and the condemned duplicity, desired wholeness, of man.”<sup>39</sup> James explicitly states that it is because we are made in the image of God, that we are not to slander our brothers and sisters (3:9). And while it is not explicitly stated, the contrasting statements of God’s integrity and man’s duplicity show that for man to live an ethical life, he must imitate God. The creator is the one “with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (1:18), and we as his likeness, should not be “double-minded” (1:8; 4:8). Hence Colin Gunton’s appraisal of the doctrine of the image of God is consistent with the teaching of James:

The doctrine of the image of God represents a relation, primarily to God the creator and secondarily to the other creatures, animate and inanimate alike. It is not, as has so often been held in the past, a capacity to know or not to know God, or at least not primarily that, especially if that is taken in the sense of intellectual knowledge.<sup>40</sup>

Sin, however, has greatly damaged man’s ability live in a manner consistent with his office as the image of God, and James acknowledges this. The man who knows the law, but does not do it is like a man who forgets “the face of his genesis” (τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ) after gazing into a mirror (1:22).<sup>41</sup> Likewise the slanderous tongue “is a fire. . . setting on fire the cycle of nature” (τὸν τροχὸν τῆς γενέσεως) in 3:6.<sup>42</sup> It is only by receiving the *implanted word—the word of truth*—with meekness, as is evidence by our adherence to the *law of liberty*, that we remember *the face of our genesis*. It is then that we serve as a firstfruits of creation, born by means of the word of truth.

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<sup>37</sup> Schwöbel, 146–172.

<sup>38</sup> R. St. John Parry, *A Discussion of the General Epistle of St. James* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1903), 24.

<sup>39</sup> Sophie Laws, “The Doctrinal Basis for the Ethics of James,” *Studia Evangelica* 7 (1973): 299–305; 301.

<sup>40</sup> Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 198.

<sup>41</sup> Gerald H. Rendall, *The Epistle of St. James and Judaic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), 56; Parry, 17–18.

<sup>42</sup> Rendall, 60.

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