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Who's your daddy? Gendered birth images in the soteriology of the Epistle of James (1:14-15, 18, 21)

William R. Baker

Dr Baker is Professor of New Testament at Cincinnati Bible Seminary and Editor of the Stone-Campbell Journal.

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While the shackles that Luther, and then Dibelius, hammered onto the Epistle of James continue to be loosened, progress is slow. Study of theology in James continues to be encumbered by Luther's withering denunciation of James as an 'epistle of straw'[1] because it does not contain his revolutionary message of justification by faith alone and Dibelius's paranetic construct laid over the whole epistle that induced him to pronounce: 'Jas has no "theology".'[2] In a labor of love for this NT treasure, scholars have worked long and hard to repair the damage done by these two towering figures. Redaction, structuralist, literary, rhetorical and various contextual strategies applied to James have risen to its rescue and demonstrated the flaws in Dibelius's crippling approach.[3] Intertextual work has focused on discovering and proclaiming James's compatibility with Paul on the matter of justification by faith and works.[4] Focused attention to the theology of James apart from these two concerns, however, remains in its infancy.[5]

Recent work on James has begun to recognize a problem with identifying James's theology too quickly with the highly developed theology of Paul.[6] Effort to read James independently and to develop understanding of the ideological world of its author, primarily from a Jewish/wisdom perspective, has begun to

1 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (ed. A. R. Wentz; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 396.
2 Martin Dibelius, *James* (rev. Heinrich Greeven; trans. Michael Williams; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 21.
3 Matt Jackson-McCabe, 'The Messiah Jesus in the Mythic World of James', *JBL* (2003), 703.
4 Andrew Chester and Ralph Martin, *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude* (New Testament Theology; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 20-28; Richard Bauckham, *James* (New Testament Readings; New York: Routledge, 1999), 118.
5 Chester and Martin, *James*, 16-45; William Baker, 'Epistle of James', in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (ed. Kevin Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 347-351.
6 Robert Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* (New Testament in Context; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 26.

emerge.[7] This is a helpful trend, because while James was shackled as a canonical document by Luther, the remedy applied by some amounted to shackling James to Paul instead.[8] A strategy of vindicating James's place in the NT by seeking to demonstrate its compatibility, or even dependence on Paul or the world of Paul's ideas, too easily prompts reading James with colored glasses. What is needed are more efforts to read James theologically while wearing blinders that restrict glances over to the rest of the theologies of the NT, particularly the imposing one of Paul's.

Because of its diminutive stature, the theology of James almost always appears insufficient compared to others in the NT, certainly Paul's. What invariably impacts the reader is what James does not say, the theology it does not have. Thus, one can observe that James has no pneumatology (and perhaps suggest that his wisdom theology replaces this),[9] little christology (emphasizing the potentially cosmetic additions of 'Jesus Christ' to the book),[10] even less soteriology (none that is dependent on the cross, resurrection) and, of course, no justification by faith alone.

Given its occasional nature, like all NT letters, however, it is unwise to presume that the ideas in James represent the complete Christianity of either its author or its readers. As Marshall advises in his recent volume on New Testament theology, a strategy of seeking to understand thoroughly the untypical language of James for its own sake sets serious readers on the right path toward discovering the assumed theology that informs its author.[11]

The goal of this study is to hike along this path to which Marshall points by taking a very close look at James's language about salvation, in particular the images of sexual union and birth in 1:14-15, 18, 21, to discover the dominant image of salvation (and also judgment) in the epistle. This study will suggest that James views salvation and its opposite through the lens of human conception and birth. In salvation the father (God) conceives in his submissive wife (the

7 Ibid., 13; Bauckham, *James*, 29-111. Patrick Hartin, '"Who is Wise and Understanding Among You" (James 3:12)? An Analysis of Wisdom, Eschatology and Apocalypticism in the Epistle of James,' *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 53 (1997), 969-999.

8 Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), recommends 'reading James's teaching about works in light of Paul's teaching that Christ's works are themselves the product of God's work of grace'. See also Timo Laato, 'Justification According to James: A Comparison with Paul', *TrinJ* 18 (1997), 43-84, particularly, 49-50.

9 J. A. Kirk, 'The Meaning of Wisdom in James: Examination of a Hypothesis', *NTS* 16 (1969), 24; Peter Davids, *Commentary on James* (NIGTC: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 55.

10 Chester and Martin, James, 44-45. L. Massebieu, 'L 'Epître de Jacques est-elle l'oeuvre d'un chrétien?' *RHR* 32(1895) 249-243; F. Spitta, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur des Urchristentums 2: Der Brief des Jakobus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1896).

11 I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 694.

unsaved person) the newborn child (the saved believer). The opposite of this picture is the unsaved individual imagined as a lustful, wandering male, who conceives in a prostitute (Desire) a dreadful child (Sin) who herself gives birth to a child bearing the full force of God's judgment (Death). It will further be shown that this feminine, submissive image of the believer versus the wanderlust male image for those unsaved is reinforced throughout the rest of the epistle. The decisive, correlative role of the word of truth (1:18) and the implanted word (1:21) will also be explicated.

Preliminary reconnaissance: divergent markings from previous travelers

Peering down the path toward investigating the images (or mythic world) of James 1:14-15, 18, 21, evident are the markings of middle way well-worn by earlier hikers. These travelers have strewn the path with cans marked 'Paul's concept of rebirth,' wrappers that say 'Johannine worldview,' and notes labeled 'NT and the cross' and 'Christ's Resurrection and Salvation.' A few scrawlings on side trees say 'creation' or 'Israel.' Barely detectable along the very edge of the path is evidence of a more recent traveler who deliberately skirted the middle path.

Investigation into salvation in James has focused almost exclusively on the goal of solving the theological crisis James 2:14-26 poses when it is laid beside what Paul says in places like Romans and Galatians. For the most part, such studies are successful in pointing out that Paul and James have different purposes and different definitions of their words. Paul writes from the perspective of a believer who enters into salvation by faith alone initially but James writes from the perspective of established believers who have carelessly ignored the value God places on behavior consistent with their faith (perhaps have even purposefully employed Paul's language to support their unrighteous behavior) that James thinks puts their very salvation in question. The few theological studies done on 'salvation' in James typically will involve 2:14-26 and little else.[12] However, such studies have gotten the cart before the horse in terms of reading James in context. James first introduces its concept of salvation in 1:14-15, 18, 21, which sets the stage for everything else that follows.

The common, middle path views the salvation birth image of James 1:14-15, 18, 21, to be essentially the same as Paul's rebirth and regeneration metaphor.[13] In other words, James is read with the assumption that its author, because he is a first-century Christian, holds to the dominant NT image, found throughout its pages, in John, in Peter, of which Paul is the most articulate. So, despite the fact that James never refers to the Holy Spirit, the cross, the death of Christ, redemption, or many other key ideas, the spiritual anthropological model that depends

12 Chester and Martin, *James*, 20-28; Moo, *James*, 37-43.
13 Hartin, '"Who is Wise?"' 981; Dibelius, *James*, 103-107; Moo, *James*, 89-90.

on these developed concepts is still used to read James. Thus, the preeminent 'good gift' from God (1:17), understood as wisdom in James's context, is read as equivalent to Paul's language of God's grace in bestowing the Holy Spirit upon the baptism and conversion of believers.[14] The 'word of truth' (1:18) and the 'implanted truth' (1:21) are 'the gospel' and all of this is 'the baptismal proclamation.'[15] The character traits of 'wisdom from above' (3:17-18) are read as Paul's 'gifts of the Spirit.'[16]

However, if one was not seeking to read James under the canopy of Pauline theology, it would be observed that it does not readily acquiesce to such a reading: square pegs are being forced into round holes. In fact, it may be observed that nowhere does it ever say or insinuate that the author conceives of conversion even as conversion to Christ. Rather, uppermost is converting readers finally and fully to a trusting relationship with God.[17]

The alternative, minor way of look at James' birth/conversion image is as an image based on God's creation. This approach, most often associated with Hort but most recently articulated by Laws,[18] recognizes that James offers few signposts that it is in the same world of salvation ideas as the rest of the NT. It has recognized the imposition of the dominant NT conversion image on James by others and has tried to shield James from this. Thus, this view sees James as pre-pauline in a sense, viewing its dominant connection to the world of Jewish ideas.

In this approach, the dominant salvation image in James is to be found in the Hebrew image of man's origins. In the beginning God created Adam. As the heavens and earth were created by God's utterance, so humankind was created by God's breath. Thus, just like all human beings have their origins in God's 'word', so do all those who are saved have their origin in 'the word of truth' from God (1:18). The gospel message delivered though his messengers (like James) implements the same power of God seen in creation. Thus, the saved are those who are given life (salvation) like the original Adam though the creative power of God's word. This 'word of truth' in a sense resuscitates the original 'implanted word' every human being already has which has lain dormant (because of sin).

A clear advantage of this approach is that it better accounts for the reference to God as the 'father of lights' in the immediate context (1:17) and also the creation motif of 3:1-13. It interprets 'first-fruits' to be God's creation of Adam, who,

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14 Laato, 'Justification', 48; Davids, James, 55. Further examination of this issue is in William R. Baker, 'Wisdom in the Epistle of James and the Holy Spirit: Are They the Same?' *TynBul* 58 (2007), forthcoming.

15 Laato, 'Justification', 49.

16 Davids, *James*, 54.

17 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 164; William Baker, 'The Priority of God in the Epistle of James' (Evangelical Theological Society Presentation, 2003).

18 F. J. A. Hort, *The Epistle of James* (London: MacMillan, 1909), 33-34; Sophie Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 75-78

though not literally the first of God's creation was in fact the best.[19] Believers, then, are not necessarily literally the 'first' to be saved (keeping in mind people of faith like Abraham) but do represent the best of God's intentions for creating humans.[20]

The one that skirts alongside the path builds on the view of those seeing the primal salvation image in James to be creation. Jackson-McCabe arrives at a conclusion similar to Hort, though by different means. He contends that James has connected the Jewish notion of Law to the Stoic idea that God 'implants' in human beings at creation a law that stands opposed to human desire.[21] Beyond that, Jackson-McCabe argues forcefully that the dominant mythic concept in James does not draw from Pauline ideas of birth and regeneration[22] but rather is based on to pre-NT messianic concepts of a conquering messiah who would restore the twelve tribes of Israel to their land, but only 'after destroying the wicked.'[23] Thus, he takes very seriously the opening language of 1:1.

Jackson-McCabe is definitely on to something in rejecting wholesale the majority efforts to read James via a Pauline mythic world. Searching for this in Jewish ideology seems the right direction. However, the mythic world McCabe has found seems only half-developed. It explains the confrontation and judgment of evil encouraged in James. Yet, it does not do much to explain the flipside, the positive side of salvation of believers.

Like Jackson-McCabe, this study desires to throw out the Pauline spectacles in order to read James fresh, extending beyond the beneficial work he has done. Looking at James as operating in an independent world of ideas will help to explain some elements of the relevant passages that have been left unexplained or unsatisfactorily explained in other approaches. Such things as the precise role of the 'word of truth', God's gendered role in the images, who the 'mother' is, and the function of 'implanted/innate' in 1:21 in relationship to 1:18 cry out for better integration into understanding James's birth images.

Giving birth to death and life: competing images in 1:14-15 and 1:18

Approaches to explain how to understand 'gave us birth' in James 1:18 vary widely and in this demonstrate the absence of a consensus. However, noting that *apokueō*, whether regarding animals or humans, normally refers to the one who

19 Laws, *James*, 75; Hort, *James*, 34-35. See also comments by Dibelius, *James*, 106.

20 The only real alternative to the idea that first fruits refers to Adam is that it refers to Christian believers. The third alternative, that first fruits refers to Israel, as Laws, *James*, 75-77, discusses, can be defended by such references to Israel in Jer. 2:3 and in Philo (*De Spec. Leg.* 4.180), but this does not pan out well in the context of James.

21 Jackson-McCabe, 'Mythic World', 709-712.

22 Ibid., 706. Also, Dibelius, *James*, 105.

23 Ibid., 719.

bears offspring rather than the procreator, commentators commonly presume God to be the mother in this picture, soliciting support from the rare presence of other female images for God found in the OT, particularly Isa 66:13 ('As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you').[24] One even draws attention to the striking image of a father giving birth.[25] However, a more fulfilling image can be drawn if God, consistent with the paternal image projected for him throughout the OT and NT, is the procreator rather than the one who bears the offspring.

One of the more obvious reasons for understanding James to be envisaging God as father rather than mother here is that the immediately preceding verse (1:17) speaks of God as 'the Father of the heavenly light'. Obviously, James did not have to call God 'father' in this verse. Given the context of creation, it would have seemed even more appropriate to have called him 'Creator'. In the later creation context of 3:9, James remains consistent in again calling God 'Father' as well as in 1:27. It must be assumed that James's purposeful choice of projecting a paternal image for God carries over to1:18, unless it says something to disrupt this image.

Rather than undoing the paternal image for God, James reinforces it in 1:18 and in its wider context. First, 1:18 begins with the participle, 'having chosen' or 'having first decided' (*boulētheis*), a word that projects the origin of this offspring in the rational faculty of God's mind. This is a decidedly male image, especially in the ancient world where men decide to initiate procreation while women submit to their will.[26] Second, the paternal image for God is reinforced when God is projected as the provider. In 1:5, he is the one who 'gives generously,' and in 1:7 the one from whom people 'receive' things. In 1:16, 'every good and perfect gift' is from him.

The presence of *apokueō* in 1:18 is not enough to overturn the dominant paternal image in this verse. Although it is true that in large part *gennaō* is used for the male role in the conception of children and its synonym *tiktō* for the female role in childbearing,[27] when either is used metaphorically, as *apokueō* is here,[28] a much wider range of use is possible. Also, it is a reasonable suggestion, since the only two uses of the word in the NT are here and in 1:15, that its presence and its function in 1:18 are best explained in terms of its presence and function in the earlier verse.[29]

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24 Davids, *James*, 88-89; Johnson, *James*, 197; Ralph Martin, *James* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, TX: Word, 1988) 39; Patrick Hartin, *James* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2003), 93.

25 Walter Wilson, 'Sin as Sex and Sex with Sin: The Anthropology of James 1:12-15', *HTR* 95 (2002), 167.

26 Wilson, 'Sin as Sex', 155. Note the NT example in 1 Pet. 3:6 where Sarah's projection as a model for Christian women revolves around her submission to Abraham as 'master,' which implies her giving herself over to his decision for them to give birth to the promised heir. See also Rom. 4:18-25.

27 J. Guhrt, 'Birth', *NIDNTT* 1:176, 187.

28 Davids, *James*, 118; Hartin, *James*, 92.

29 Martin, *James*, 38.

James 1:14-15 conjures up an image to disassociate God from any blame for human sin and its inevitable result, death. Sin and death stem from failing to love God, who alone provides 'life,' as 1:12 projects. The allegory James imagines draws upon the seductress of Proverbs 5 and 7 who tantalizes the unwary but arouses the 'adulterous' young man from the street corner into her bed.[30] In James's version the seductress effectively is named 'Desire.' This works nicely, since 'desire' (*epithumia*) is a feminine noun in Greek. The male in James's version is 'each one', whenever they are tempted to sin. Although the naive male is pictured as entrapped by the wily prostitute, nevertheless he is culpable for his sin since a male cannot really ever be 'forced' to engage in sex (unlike a female who can be overpowered and raped).

In the end, despite the enticement, it is a choice one can (and in the case of the stern warning in Proverbs) should turn away from. This little allegory works excellently for James's goal. In the very same way, however, people may be tempted to sin, in the end sin is always a willing choice, which is what makes people always culpable for it in God's moral law. True, the allegory breaks down a bit when the 'desire' itself is called 'his own' (*idias*). However, in any allegory some suspension of reality is always required at some point.

In James's allegory, a child is born as the result of the illicit sexual encounter between the choice or will of the individual and his Desire. This bundle of joy is a girl, whom James christens with the name 'Sin' (*hamartia*), which again helpfully is a feminine noun in Greek. 'Sin' turns out to be the spitting image of her mother. Sin herself, when she comes of age (*apoteleō*) and is capable of bearing children, bears a yet worse offspring (presumably with an illicit lover), whose name is 'Death' (*thanatos*). This 'grandchild' in the allegory is meant to convey the moral lesson that God's death-order for individuals who sin is entirely the result of their own choices to sin because every sin ultimately originates in their own will, regardless of the enormity of the temptation.

Much work has been done to demonstrate the connection of this internal conflict people have regarding sin in James to the Jewish concept of evil *yetzer*.[31] Evil *yetzer* (*yetzer hara*), a concept developed in later Judaism but present in a pseudepigraphal document like the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, explains how the evil deeds of a person are not directly traceable to anything God did in his creation of humanity. God endowed *yetzer* in every person, the instinctual desire to survive, prosper, and propagate. This positive inclination, however, can draw people into harmful or evil activity, like murder, theft, and rape by perverting this positive inclination God gave into negative inclinations like envy, greed, and lust. Thus, good people are those who do not yield to their 'evil inclination' (*yetzer hara*), their inner tempter. When they do succumb to their evil inclination and commit sin, God cannot rightly be blamed for this. He did not make them

30 Davids, *James*, 84; Moo, *James*, 76.

31 Wilson, 'Sin as Sex', 162-163; Davids, *James*, 85-86; Wall, *James*, 61; Joel Marcus, 'Evil Inclination in the Epistle of James', *CBQ* 44 (1982), 606-621; Hartin, *James*, 91.

evil or put evil in them. They yielded to a perversion in themselves of something he created for their good.

Although appeal to the evil inclination dynamic in Hebrew thought explains a great deal of what James 1:14-15 is doing, it does not offer any explanation for the origin of the birth allegory. However, Wilson is very convincing in drawing a parallel to concepts found in Philo,[32] the first-century AD Jewish Alexandrian intellect who made it his life's work to explain the truths of Hebrew thought in ways compatible with Greek philosophical notions. Philo, in line with Platonic thought, views human beings to be divided into rational and irrational parts. The mind (*nous*), the eternal, God-like essence of each person has male qualities of rationality, decisiveness, strength, and superiority. Desire (*epithumia*), along with pleasure (*hēdonē* – 4:1), makes use of the sense perceptions of the body to undermine reason and is embued with feminine qualities of irrationality, emotionalism, and weakness. This feminine aspect of man, like Eve, seeks to undermine this male aspect to immoral behavior idolized in Eve seducing Adam and evil women drawing men into sexual union. This unnatural submission of the male aspect to the female, Philo says, breeds further lustfulness for pleasure that may lead to death. In order to be successful, the rational, male aspect must control the irrational, female aspect, and this can only happen when people submit their minds to the will of God rather than falling victims to the seductions of their feminine 'desire.' As Wilson says, 'In the end, it would seem that desire's most insidious quality lies in its potential to "unman" the soul.'[33]

The goal, then, is to 'rule oneself as God rules the world.'[34] When people resist desire they will no longer bear children of pleasure and death. Rather, they will receive the seed of God and bear instead qualities of wisdom and justice. The vehicle of God's procreation of these virtues according to Philo is the 'divine logos'. In creation, this male action of God occurs with Wisdom to produce the world. In the human soul, this male action of God occurs with the now feminized, submissive mind to produce the strength to resist desire, resulting in the triumph of person in life and in eternity.

In Philo, then, birth imagery is allegorized both negatively and positively to explain the internal conflict that occurs in people regarding their harmful or beneficial behavior in ways consistent with what James attempts to do and with overlapping terminology. Negatively, 'desire' (*epithumia*), the feminine aspect, poses a threat to the dominance of the decision-making, male aspect of a person. A person's own will is responsible for sin. As Wilson says, 'In essence, James contends that it is incumbent upon the individual to construct an internal arrangement of the self and its desire analogous to the social position men ought to occupy over women, a position of superiority and control, a position of resistance to female enticements.'[35]

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32 Wilson, 'Sin as Sex', 151-157.
33 Ibid., 155.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 164.

On the positive perspective, Philo, along with comparison to the negative allegory in 1:13-14, helps to fill out the unspecified aspects of James 1:18. First, it can be seen that the reason *apokueō* reappears in 1:18 is because it was integral to the negative allegory. James wants readers to see the positive allegory as correlative to the negative allegory. The opposite of the personal will (as male) procreating sin and death with desire (as female) is not personal will procreating moral holiness and life. This is not possible because moral holiness and life are only in God. God is not the mother here, or the absurdity of a father who gives birth.[36] Rather, as in creation God is the father of life, who through the instrument/agent of the word (the 'word of truth') procreates in the passive, submissive (feminine) human will the offspring of life, a brand new life that only he can give. This is the picture of a benevolent husband and father whom the wife adores and whom their child emulates. This is not a rebirth, like re-entering his mother's womb (John 3:3-4) or a *re*generation through baptism(Rom. 6:3-6); it is a *birth* image, a *multi*-generational image.

The image of a husband who is loved by his submissive wife was already suggested in James 1:12 at the beginning of his allegorical tale when it describes those who resist temptation as those who love God and receive the bounty of his reward, the crown of life. The second is seen to begin with the reference to 'first fruits.' The offspring of a person's union with the divine is the best of the earth's harvest because it carries in its genetic makeup the father-God's DNA so to speak. Interwoven into the fiber of these human first-fruits are the holy qualities of God's own character. They are a virtual super-species of humanity. But who are they?

The word of truth, the innate word and the identity of the offspring

The identity of this super-species, these first-fruits who are the product of God and submission to God's will, is bound up in the term 'word of truth', employed in James 1:18. Those who take the first-fruits to be Adam and Eve consider the word of truth to be the very breath of God which makes all of humanity invested with 'the image of God'.[37] Those who might suggest first-fruits to be Israel, those who are the first product of God's revelation of himself to Abraham, would connect word of truth to the Mosaic law. Those who believe first-fruits are to be identified with Christians understand the word of truth to be a reference to the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

The fact that the Epistle of James is a Christian document is indisputable, despite the criticisms that occasionally have been leveled against it. While it is true that it only mentions 'Jesus Christ' twice formally, it employs a variety of terms to refer to him throughout (Lord, judge, the name).[38] It also assumes the pres-

36 Ibid., 167, surprisingly draws this conclusion.
37 Hort, *James*, 34; Laws, *James*, 75.
38 William Baker, 'Christology in the Epistle of James', *EvQ* 54 (2002), 47-58.

ence of Christian community who are the recipients (5:13-21) and constantly depends on identifiable teaching of Jesus. Thus, the environment of the epistle itself gives the advantage to understanding word of truth as the gospel. Outside the epistle, commentators routinely note the exact use of this term in multiple NT documents to refer to the gospel (Eph 1:18; Col 1:5; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 1:25), including once in 2 Cor 6:7 where it is used anarthrously as it appears in James.[39] If the author of the epistle is James of Jerusalem, one of the three key leaders of the fledgling Christian movement, along with Paul and Peter, as many suppose, there is no reason to think that he would not acquire common, traditional terminology. Thus, word of truth most likely is a reference to the gospel.

Yet, since James 1:18 does not *say* 'gospel' we wonder what the author intends readers to do with 'word of truth' within the birth allegory. The most likely goal is for readers to see the gospel as rooted in the most primal aspect of God's creative force. It is another breath of God that brings people to life. The gospel is not a brand new power spreading through humanity somehow separate from God's original life-giving force; it is the same. Thus, James's Christian readers are being told that their birth into a new life is an extension of God's original purpose for creating humanity in the first place. The 'word of truth' either acts as God's agent like a surrogate father or is simply the instrument (the life-giving force) that unites with those who believe the gospel and submit to God to create and bring to birth a new person, a believing Christian.

James 1:21 is recognized by all as ideologically connected to 1:18. Yet, its language appears perplexingly incongruous. Why tell someone to receive something they already have, and have innately, or naturally? Much consternation revolves around the word 'implanted' (*emphutos*), used only here in the NT. Those who take 'word of truth' in 1:18 simply to be the gospel run into a problem if they take *emphutos* at face value. The word almost always refers to something that is innate, natural, or congenital rather than something added to something else later. Hort's defense of this lexical information usually is quickly rejected.[40] Obviously, the gospel is not innate to a human being. It is 'implanted' later when someone accepts the message of Christ. Resolving this dilemma is crucial in terms of James's soteriology because 1:21 is the only verse in this context that mentions being 'saved'.

A solution to 1:21 can be suggested by recognizing the positive birth allegory of 1:18 as intended both to mirror and replace the negative allegory of 1:14-15. If so, then just as the child of the union between self-will and Desire carries the genetic makeup of Desire (and herself gives birth to death), so the child born from the union of God via the word of truth with those who submit to the gospel carries the DNA of the word of God. The birthed believer who is the product of this union in this picture, then, does in fact have the word within their genetic

39 Davids, *James*, 89.

40 Hort, *James*, 37. Johnson, *James*, 202; Wall, *James*, 72; Moo, *James*, 87; Davids, *James*, 95.

makeup. It is 'innate' from birth as Hort correctly lobbies. Just as Sin fully realizes her affinity to her mother, Desire, and gives birth to Death, so the birthed believer as she grows into maturity not only recognizes how she is 'like her father' but accepts and acts on the natural impulses to be like her father, the Word of Truth.

Thus, the command to receive the innate word is a command to draw fully upon the power of God's word that is interwoven into every fiber of the believer's being, a power delivered from God's creative word through the gospel. It is not something foreign from outside. Thus, to rebel against the drive of these 'natural' impulses is to be prideful and arrogant. To fail to act in congruence with God's DNA running through the believer's veins is to fail to 'humbly receive the word implanted.' It is a rejection of the believer's father as father while knowing fully that a paternity test would confirm his DNA in them.

The word of truth in James 1:18 refers, then, to the gospel, but the gospel as an extension of the creative breath of God. The innate word in James 1:21 is a reference back to this same word of truth, as the surrogate father or seed of God's implantation in the new life that is given birth from those who submit to his will. This is consistent with the image of God in the NT as the planter who spreads his seed (Matt 21:33; Mark 12:1; Luke 20:7)[41] and those who grow up healthy as his community (Matt 15:13).

Gendered images of salvation reinforced in James

The birth allegory and images of salvation in James 1:13-14, 18, 21 can be seen to blanket the entire epistle and to emerge at various points. Two aspects of the images are most significant: the word as congenital in the mature life of the believer, and the importance of continuing to submit to God's will in a feminine way as opposed to self-assertion as male in opposition to God's directives. Rereading the epistle in light of these images proves enlightening.

Mature believers who are themselves offspring of the Word of Truth, among other things, should find both hearing and doing the word quite natural (1:22). They should know that angry words contradict behavior God expects because they know in themselves what God's character is like. Mature believers who look at their natural faces in the mirror should see their own resemblance to God/the Word of Truth, who is their father (1:23-24). To forget when they walk away is as unnatural as people forgetting who their parents are. Having the word of truth inherent in their being makes doing God's will an exercise in freedom rather than blind obedience to an exterior command. It is the 'perfect law' in that sense (1:25). As believers follow in the footsteps of their father, then, they devote themselves to causes he has devoted himself to, like caring for widows and orphans (1:27). Believers also do not allow themselves to be contaminated by the evil of the world (1:27) just as God does not (1:13), but rather expel 'all the moral filth

41 Wilson, 'Sin as Sex', 168.

and the evil that is so prevalent' from their lives as the power of his character in them makes possible.

As their Father does not show favoritism towards the poor or the rich (2:1), neither do we placate the wealthy and insult the poor in our behavior nor in the gathering of our community. As their Father's character and actions are one, so their faith and trust in him is inextricably woven into how they conduct their lives (2:14-26). Being God's child, believers inherit his wisdom and attempt to bring peace and harmony into the world but disassociate themselves from the influence of the devil who brings chaos (3:13-18).

Those who bring disharmony into the believing community are reverting back into the pattern of their former life. They are functioning as male and allowing themselves to be seduced by Desire and Pleasure (4:1-2). The assertion of their self-will insults God (4:4) and leads them to insulting others (3:9), brothers and sisters in the faith 4:11. 5:9), who like them are God's progeny. In doing so, they are going against their own nature as God's offspring, like a fig tree bearing olives (3:12). The solution is to re-feminize, to submit again to God sincerely and finally, to reject the devil, who is the father of the temptress Desire (3:7). God the strong provider will come to them, lift them up and give them life again.

Like cavorting with Desire and Pleasure, boasting is an act of maleness. Making decisions about the future without consulting with God is an act of open defiance, the opposite of humble submission. (4:13-17). Those who are rich epitomize those who make their own decisions and fail to submit to him. The poor are those who are feminized by the dominance of the rich over them and do not oppose them (5:1-6). Yet, they are being forced to submit to the rich when the only one who really protects them and to who they must submit is God. Like them, though forced to submit to the cruelties of men and nature, Job's true submission to God was vindicated (5:11). The community of the faithful are those who, despite trouble or joy in their lives, willingly and openly submit themselves to God through prayer and to one another through confession (5:13-21), even to the point of venturing outside the warmth of the community to bring one of their brothers/sisters back who has left the community, abandoned God, and lost touch with the truth still resident with them as those who once believed and became the offspring of God's word of truth. To be outside the community is to be reunited with Temptress Desire, whose progeny Sin gives birth to Death.

The spiritual lesson of this moral tale is that only being wedded to the truth of God and conducting oneself consistently with that union results in life. Self-assertion re-unites one with desire, resulting in death. Believers in Christ who are cavorting with Desire need to break off this relationship, resubmit themselves to God, fall into the loving of arms of God, who will restore them, and rejoin the faithful, submissive community of believers.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to build a cohesive picture of the unique salvation world of the Epistle of James by taking the images of birth the author has provid-

ed that lead to a person's death in 1:14-15 in order to fill in the mirrored images of 1:18 and 1:21 that lead to salvation. What has emerged is a multi-generational allegory in which the union of a person with Desire births Sin who births Death, while the union of the Word of Truth (the gospel) with a person births a Christian who births Salvation. This allegorical conception of salvation helps provide a consistent framework for understanding the rest of the epistle. This is especially so with regard to the male identity of the Death pattern and the female identity of the Salvation pattern.[42]

No doubt, some may question that the allegorical conception has been drawn out more specifically than the author intended. Yet, the contention here is that is it consistent with what the author has provided and provides a reasonable solution to passages in James that have continued to vex interpreters.

Some may also find uncomfortable the connection of femaleness with true and ultimate conversion and maleness with rebellion against God and damnation. However, these images are consistent with first-century culture. They also become readily apparent due to the impact of contemporary feminist hermeneutic. Finally, they may offer a beneficial challenge to those who seek to define their own personal relationship with God.

Abstract

A cohesive picture of the unique salvation world of the Epistle of James is achieved by taking the images of birth the author has provided that lead to a person's death in 1:14-15 in order to fill in the mirrored images of 1:18 and 1:21 that lead to salvation. What emerges is a multi-generational allegory in which the union of a person with Desire births Sin who births Death, while the union of the Word of Truth (the gospel) with a person births a Christian who births Salvation. This allegorical conception of salvation helps provide a consistent framework for understanding the rest of the epistle. This is especially so with regard to the male identity of the Death pattern and the female identity of the Salvation pattern.

42 Some may point out James 4:4 (You Adultresses!) as inconsistent with the conception of the death-bound individuals as male. Prophetically, from God's perspective, yes, they are feminine but from the dominant image of cavorting with Desire, also in the context (4:1), the conception is still conceived of as a male uniting with a female. Quarrelling, fighting, and murder (4:2) are also male images.