

50. The use of these words indicates that it is quite possible James was familiar with the writings of Plato, Homer, and other classical writers.
51. These illustrations use the universe and its structure to teach continuity within the system, yet even though the universe and its objects function as a unit they constantly change positions and cast shadows.
52. Although they make up the environment we depend upon to sustain us in time, the Creator's immutable essence consistently provides for us our logistical provisions, his unfailing love, and His immutable Word.

James 1:17 Every good-of-intrinsic-value act of giving and every completed gift keeps on being from above, coming down from the ultimate source of the Father of lights, with Whom there is no change or alteration or the occurrence of an eclipse. (EXT)

PRINCIPLES:

1. These celestial illustrations refer to the character of God. On the one hand, He has created the environment in which we are designed to function.
2. On the other hand, He is the only reliable constant upon Whom we may rely upon with absolute trust. He does not change, nor does His Word go into eclipse.
3. His gifts are available to every person from Adam to the end of the universe, the first being salvation of the soul. Afterward, we have "completed gifts" available to serve Him by submitting to a serious study of His word.
4. The Christian way of life is based on grace. When a believer orients totally on this principle, then the unfailing love of God will supply him with all his needs:

Ephesians 3:19 To know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

v. 20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us. (NASB)

5. God keeps His Word! This is why it is imperative to understand grace because everything depends on what God is and God never changes. Human merit is never a part of the equation.
6. Whether or not we advance in His plan, God never changes. His unfailing love continues without pause. His integrity continues, His grace continues. Nothing depends on us.
7. Where we come into the picture is when we make the decision to make the study of the Word priority one, to grow in grace, and to apply what we know.
8. The Word of God is the same as the Person of God. His Word is the complete gift, it is immutable, it possesses integrity, it is alive and powerful. It can move a mountain when that mountain refers to the challenges of the devil's world.
9. When the verse concludes with the phrase about no "shifting shadow," it refers to the permanency of the Word of God and it can become permanent in the soul of anyone who commits to its inculcation and application.
10. The major problem with many believers is that the Word they acquire in Bible class stops there. The reason is that it is eclipsed in their souls through negative volition which results in no application in their daily lives.
11. The grace of God is not eclipsed because the unfailing love of God is never eclipsed. This means that the Word of God is never eclipsed and may be accessed with positive volition.
12. The only way the Word can be eclipsed is in the soul of a negative-volition believer.

James 1:17 Every good-of-intrinsic-value act of giving and every completed gift keeps on being from above, coming down from the ultimate source of the Father of lights, with Whom there is no change or alteration or the occurrence of an eclipse. (EXT)

James 1:18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. (NASB)

1. This translation is a bit murky but it is better than the King James Version which reads, “Of His Own will begat He us with the word of truth,”
2. The phrase that is clear is, “He brought us forth by the word of truth.” If God and His plan are to be understood they must be derived from Scripture.
3. The Bible enlightens us about Who God is, His plan, His provisions in every circumstance in life. God is perfectly happy and by studying the Word we can share in that happiness.
4. The power of the Word in the soul of the believer is capable of dealing with every situation in life whether seen or unseen. It’s just a matter of pulling some things together.
5. The verse begins with the phrase “In the exercise of His will.” The word “will” is the aorist passive participle of the verb **βούλομαι (bouílomai)**. When related to God it refers to His divine decree.
6. What is murky is the use of the word *will* which has a number of definitions in English. What we need is an English definition that refers to the thinking of God. To find that we must go to Noah Webster’s *An American Dictionary of the English Language* published in 1828:
Divine determination; to decide in the mind that something shall be done or forborne; implying power to carry the purpose into effect. In this manner God wills whatever comes to pass.³
7. This is the best we can do in English, but the verb **βούλομαι (bouílomai)**, when referring to the will of God, is best translated, “divine decree”:

³ Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1st ed. (New York: S. Converse, 1828, repr. San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 2000), s.v. “will.”

The decree of God is His eternal, holy, wise, and sovereign purpose, comprehending simultaneously all things that ever were or will be in their causes, conditions, successions, and relations and determining their certain futuration.

The decree of God is His eternal and immutable will regarding the future existence of events which will happen in time and regarding the precise order and manner of their occurrence.

The divine decree is the eternal plan by which God has rendered certain all the events of the universe, including both angelic and human history—past, present, and future. God’s decree rendered all things as certain to occur. In doing so, He did not interfere with angelic or human free will! In fact, He decreed that we would have free will!⁴

8. The passive voice of *boúlomai* requires the translation, “having been decreed.” Further, the action of the aorist participle always precedes the action of the main verb which at all times is in the indicative mood.
9. The main verb here is the aorist active indicative of **ἀποκνέω (*apokueō*)**: “to give birth from the ultimate source.” This word is the compound of the prefix **ἀπό**, “from,” a preposition of ultimate source that is attached to the verb **κνέω** “to be pregnant.”
10. To smooth out the translation, the verse’s opening reads, “Having been decreed in eternity past, God regenerated *us* by a spiritual birth.” The pronoun *us* refers to those who believe in Jesus Christ in human history.
11. The doctrine of regeneration is among the 40 things imputed to the believer at the moment of salvation.
 - (1) Regeneration is a theological term and is commonly referred to as the second birth and also the act of being “born again.”
 - (2) Jesus used this term in his opening remarks to Nicodemus in:

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to Nicodemus, “I am telling you the truth, unless one is born again [γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν (*gennēthē ánōthen*): “born from above”] he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (EXT)

⁴ R. B. Thieme, Jr., “The Doctrine of the Divine Decree,” in *The Integrity of God*, 4th ed. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 2005), 297–98.

- (3) The term, “born again” refers to spiritual birth at salvation which by application refers only to believers saved by grace through faith.
- (4) Occasionally we hear a person make the statement, “I am a ‘born-again’ Christian,” or pose the question, “Are you a ‘born-again’ Christian?” Principle: You are not a Christian unless you have been born again therefore the phrase, “born-again Christian,” is a periphrasis.⁵
- (5) Jesus gave an excellent formula for how one may be “born from above” in John 3:16. It is the imputation of divine righteousness that confirms a person’s “birth from above.”
- (6) The system of salvation in the Tanakh is the same but phrased differently as is noted in:

Genesis 15:6 Then Abram **believed** [Hiphil causative perfect of the verb אָמַן (*'aman*): Abram **had been caused to believe in the past with results that last forever**] **in the Lord** [יהוָה (*Yehowah*): **God**⁶]; and He **reckoned** [חָשַׁב (*chashav*): see excerpt below] **it to him as righteousness.** (NASB)

The Hebrew verb *chashav* exhibits two basic semantic elements. The first is the element of calculation, with its modifications “account, compute, change, settle (accounts),” thus “count, value, calculate.” The second is the element of planning: “think out, conceive.” (p. 230)

The semantic focus “calculate,” can be understood as the center of a semantic field that comprises primarily the verbs of counting.

But *chashav* goes beyond the meaning of reckoning with numbers and quantities, referring rather to values and factors in general: weighing, evaluating, calculating, rational assignment of place and rank, the technical accounting of a merchant. (p. 231)

⁵ “A roundabout way of referring to something by means of several words instead of naming it directly in a single word” (Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 165.

⁶ “אָתוֹנַי (*'Athonay*) is often used in place of the divine name *YHWH*, which was held by later Jewish belief to be too holy to utter. This designation points to the supreme authority or power of God” (Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003), 129.

The construction ... appears to be a fixed idiom meaning, “reckon something to someone’s account.” Variants and analogies include Genesis 15:6. (p. 234)

The act of accepting faith is finally reckoned as a deciding factor in the relationship with Yahweh. The expression ... calls the outcome of the events depicted a settlement of accounts in a theological sense, deliberately echoing commercial language. The interpretation of the promise to Abram found in Genesis 15:1–6 uses such expressions and ideas throughout.⁷ (p. 243)

- (7) The point being made here has to do with the balancing of the books between God and man. God provided salvation to believers prior to the cross through the coming sacrifice of Messiah.
- (8) For the divine books to balance, each individual must have righteousness credited to his account. God is unable to do this on a person-to-person basis, but only for individuals who place personal faith in Jesus Christ (or Messiah).
- (9) When Abram believed it was credited to his account for righteousness. The “born from above” formula has to do with regeneration. This word is the noun **παλιγγενεσία (palingenesía)**: “spiritual rebirth” used in:

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of human-good works which we have done in assumed righteousness while out of fellowship, but according to His mercy and grace, by the washing [λύτρον (*lútron*): spiritual cleansing by means of the gospel {see Ephesians 5:26}] even regeneration [παλιγγενεσία (palingenesía)⁸] and renewing by the Holy Spirit [indwelling]. (EXT)

- (10) The words **γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν (gennēthé ánōthen)**, “born from above” in John 3:3 and **παλιγγενεσία (palingenesía)**, “regeneration,” in Titus 3:5 help us understand the phrase **γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν (gennēthé ánōthen)**, “brought us forth” in James 1:18.

⁷ K. Seybold, “שָׁבַח,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 5:230–31, 234, 243.

⁸ **παλιγγενεσία (palingenesía)**, “regeneration,” is a compound of the adverb **πάλιν (pálin)**, “again,” and the noun **γέννησις (génnesis)**, “born”: to be born again. The word in context refers to regeneration that results from salvation.

(11) Here is how our expanded translation reads so far:

James 1:18a “Having been decreed in eternity past, God regenerated us by a spiritual birth ...

1. The next phrase gives us the link between the divine decree in eternity past and the regeneration of the believer in time.
2. This indicates that God had a plan for our lives before the universe was created. There has never been a time when God did not comprehend the future with the same perspicacity as he did the past.
3. His omniscience means he knew what decision each person would make with regard to the gospel. This in no way implies that He determined who would believe in eternity past but that He perceived who would personally make the decision to believe in time.
4. The principle regarding divine election is stated as follows: In human history, the sovereignty of God and the free will of man coexist by divine decree.
5. Because God knew who would believe and who would not does not force the conclusion that human free will does not enter into the equation.
6. The omniscience of God knows the end from the beginning including the thoughts and decisions of every person in history. Knowing who is among the elect does not mean that human free will is ignored. In human history, the volitional decisions of men inform the omniscience of God.
7. So what comes first? Election or volition? Paul informs us in Ephesians:
Ephesians 1:4 Since He elect [ἐκλέγω (*eklégō*): to select; to choose] us in Him before the foundation of the world [eternity past], that we would be holy and blameless before Him.
8. The integrity of God plus the omniscience of God predetermines in history who among the human race will from their free will independently choose to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation.