

Echoes of the *Shema* in the Letter of James

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The letter of James is both simple and complex. James' vivid imagery and simple style make his writing some of the most accessible of the New Testament. Yet despite this simplicity, interpreters continue to wrestle over basic questions such as structure, genre, and unifying theme. Over time, James has increasingly come to be seen as a first-rate theologian and careful thinker. Rather than merely being seen as a collection of proverbs somewhat arbitrarily thrown together,¹ his work has been recognized as the result of careful thought integrating his Jewish faith and belief in Jesus as the Messiah.²

One way in which this careful thought can be seen is in James' use of the Old Testament. James cites the OT on only four occasions,³ yet the influence of the OT is felt throughout.⁴ Often James' use of the OT runs deeper than can be perceived by a casual reading. For example, Luke Johnson observed that while James directly cites only Leviticus 19:18, almost every verse in Leviticus 19:12-18 is alluded to in some form throughout the letter.⁵ Such usage hardly seems

¹ Although Martin Dibelius did believe there was some general structure, this was essentially his view when he argued that the genre of James was Hellenistic parenesis in *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). Dibelius's work led many to ignore James, a state of affairs that has thankfully passed.

² For a recent survey of work that has been done in James, see Eric Mason and Darian Lockett, ed., *Reading the Epistle of James: A Resource for Students*, Resources for Biblical Study 94 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019). Two important works that seek to understand James on his own terms include Richard Bauckham *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (New York: Routledge, 1999) and Luke Cheung, *The Genre, Composition, and Hermeneutics of the Epistle of James* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007).

³ Leviticus 19:18 in James 2:8; Exodus 20:13-14 and Deuteronomy 5:17-18 in James 2:11; Genesis 15:6 in James 2:23; and Proverbs 3:34 in James 4:6. James also appears to cite an Old Testament text at James 4:5 where he asks if the "Scripture says in vain," but what follows does not align with any known Old Testament text. Numerous suggestions have been made for this text. For a brief overview of the options see Douglas Huffman, *Understanding the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Forms, Features, Framings, and Functions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024), 175-79.

⁴ James alludes to Old Testament characters (Abraham, Rahab, Elijah, Job), utilizes OT imagery (cf James 1:9-11; 3:9; 4:14; 5:1-5), and even adopts OT writing styles such as wisdom and prophecy. Allison's observation is worth noting: "James is also full of scriptural and LXX idioms, and every single paragraph carries forward themes at home in the Jewish Bible." Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle of James*, (New York; London; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013), 52.

⁵ Luke Johnson, "The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James," in *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God: Studies in the Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 123-35.

coincidental. Rather, this follows an ancient writing style which rephrased its source so as to show that the truth being rehearsed has been fully internalized.⁶

Drawing on the work of Johnson, this study proposes that the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)⁷ similarly functioned as a key text for James in the composition of his letter. James 2:19 alludes to Deuteronomy 6:4 when it sarcastically commends James' interlocutor for believing that "God is one."⁸ Both Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:4 appear in the two major opening discourses of James following his programmatic opening chapter (2:1-13, 14-26), and curiously both have the same commendation "you do well" (2:8, 19).⁹ These two OT texts (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18) form the double love command of Jesus (Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31, cf Luke). Since these two passages are connected in the Jesus tradition and since both seem to be linked in a paradigmatic way in James,¹⁰ it is worth exploring the original context of both these texts. As with Leviticus 19, when one begins to explore the literary context of Deuteronomy 6:4-5, a number of clear correspondences to the letter of James begins to emerge.

The importance of the *Shema* for James has been observed by a number of writers. Some have merely noted this connection in passing¹¹ while others have written more extensively.¹² Kim Huat Tan wrote on the New Testament's use of the *Shema*,¹³ including an entire article on

⁶ Richard Bauckham draws comparisons with Ben Sira's use of the Old Testament in *Wisdom of James*, 79. John Kloppenborg advances this by drawing a parallel with the ancient practice of *aemulatio*: "What we might call plagiarism and intellectual theft is what rhetoricians called *aemulatio*—the restating of predecessors' ideas in one's own words." "The Reception of the Jesus Tradition in James," in *The Catholic Epistles and Apostolic Tradition: A New Perspective on James to Jude*, ed. Karl-Wilhelm Niebhur and Robert W. Wall (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 71–100.

⁷ The *Shema* can refer to Deuteronomy 6:4, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, or all three texts cited twice daily by modern Jews: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; and Numbers 15:37-41. This study will primarily intend Deuteronomy 6:4-9 when it refers to the *Shema*.

⁸ There is a textual question here that will be dealt with below. Depending on how that textual question is settled, the content of this confession is either "God is one" or "there is one God."

⁹ Although masked in modern English, there is one interesting difference between these two occurrences of the phrase "you do well." In 2:8 the verb ποιέω is second person plural, whereas in 2:19 the same verb is used in the singular. The first instance is likely focused on the activity of the community in the partial way they treat visitors, whereas the second occurrence focuses on the individual and his or her lack of works.

¹⁰ For scholars who note the connections between these two discourses, see Mark Taylor, *A Text-Linguistic Investigation into the Discourse Structure of James* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 91–92; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 37A, AYB (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 246; Allison, *James*, 443–44.

¹¹ Lori Baron, *The Shema in John's Gospel*, WUNT 574 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 137–43; Cheung, *Genre, Composition, and Hermeneutics*, 188–92; Taylor, *A Text-Linguistic Investigation*, 112–13.

¹² Donald J. Verseput, "James 1:17 and the Jewish Morning Prayers," *NovT* 39, no. 2 (1997): 177–91.

¹³ "The Shema and Early Christianity," *Tyndale Bulletin* 15 (2008): 181–206; "Jesus and the Shema," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Tom Holmen and Stanley Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 2677–2707.

James' use of the *Shema*.¹⁴ Tan's study focused more on the sociological implications for the way James and the New Testament used the *Shema*, especially regarding the debates between the church and their non-Messianic Jewish contemporaries over the issue of monotheism. This study will differ from Tan's by focusing on a broader theological reading of James, paying special attention to how the themes of James's letter echo the concerns of the *Shema* and its broader Deuteronomic context.

Echoes of the OT in the NT

Schemes for exploring the New Testament's use of the Old are like the days of the judges—every interpreter develops a method that seems right in his own eyes. Debate continues over criteria for determining allusions and echoes, which terms should be used, and even how these terms should be defined.¹⁵ Richard Hays, in his seminal work *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, suggested criteria for testing allusions and echoes to the Old Testament.¹⁶ He also proposed a theory of metalepsis, wherein an author uses a previous text in a way that recalls, not just the words quoted themselves, but the entire context of the quoted or alluded text.¹⁷ His work, although often critiqued and modified, has been a helpful starting point for biblical scholarship to think through the New Testament's use of the Old.

Stanley Porter has been critical of Hays and many of the interpreters who follow him.¹⁸ While some of these criticisms might be overstated, Porter's refinement of the concept of echo will be helpful for the current study. Hays viewed allusion and echo as a scale, in which an allusion is a clearer reference to a previous text, whereas an echo is a vaguer reference. Rather than seeing echo and allusion as degrees on a spectrum, Porter argues that an echo is a reference,

¹⁴ "James and the Shema," *Trinity Theological Journal* 15 (2007): 113–28.

¹⁵ A recent work that helpful compares the views of a number of different scholars on these issues is Huffman, *Understanding the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*.

¹⁶ These included: (1) availability (would the author have access to the text?), (2) volume (how much verbal overlap exists between the two texts?), (3) recurrence (does the author cite or allude to a given text in other places?), (4) thematic coherence (how similar are the themes of the OT text and the NT text?), (5) historical probability (how likely would the author have been to make such an allusion or echo?), (6) history of interpretation (have other interpreters seen this allusion or echo?), and (7) satisfaction (how well does a proposed reading of the OT text "fit"?). Originally discussed in Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 29–32. These seven criteria were reestablished and further developed by Hays in *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 34–45. Many have adopted and modified Hays views. See, for example, Christopher Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, Biblical Interpretation Series 96 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 11–40.

¹⁷ See Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in Paul*, 20. While Hays borrowed the language for this theory in dialogue with secular scholars, the idea that the context of an OT passage was important for the NT author had been proposed years earlier by C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (Digswell Place: James Nisbet and Company Limited, 1952), 57–61.

¹⁸ Stanley E. Porter, *Tradition in the New Testament: Tracing Old Testament Themes in the Gospels and Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 3–24.

not to a single text, but to a network of texts.¹⁹ Porter refers to these networks of texts as “sacred traditions.”

For this study, a citation or quotation will refer to instances where a previous source is copied verbatim.²⁰ A verbal allusion²¹ will refer to instances where language from a previous text has been partially adapted but is still used in a way intended to reference a previous text.²² Finally, an echo will refer to a network of texts that develop a given theme. A modified version of Hays’ criteria will be used for evaluating proposed allusions and echoes. Since the *Shema* as a text was both available and highly prominent to James and his audience, potential allusions and echoes will be argued for on the basis of (1) lexical correspondence and semantically similar terminology (2) thematic connections, especially in structurally significant texts, (3) correspondence with the Jesus tradition when that tradition also utilizes Deuteronomic texts or themes, and (4) the exegetical value provided in explaining the text of James.

James, Jesus, and Deuteronomy

James was a Christian theologian and much of James’s teaching echoes the teaching of Jesus. For this reason, it is worth briefly exploring how Jesus uses Deuteronomy, since that may shed light on how James read Deuteronomy. Before examining James, then, the relationship between Jesus and Deuteronomy will be explored.

Jesus and Deuteronomy

Jesus’ clearest uses of Deuteronomy come at two of the most crucial moments in his ministry: (1) when he was tempted by the devil in the wilderness and (2) when he was asked about the greatest commandment in the law. These two incidents come at the beginning and end of his ministry respectively. Together they give us insight into how Jesus read the Old Testament as a whole and Deuteronomy in particular.

¹⁹ Porter, *Sacred Traditions*, 43-46.

²⁰ Some distinguish between citations, which include an introductory formula, and quotations, which may or may not include introductory formulas. Such distinctions are unnecessarily fine for the book of James.

²¹ Verbal allusions specify allusions that are text based, (i.e., they are meant to remind the reader of a series of words in a text). Allusions can also be to events (e.g., creation or exile) or persons (e.g., Elijah or Job), but such allusions are not the focus of this study.

²² On the so-called “intentional fallacy,” the argument that the intention of an author cannot be known because the author cannot be consulted, see E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), 1–19.

The Temptation of Jesus

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness immediately follows his baptism, which marked him as the Son of God (cf Psalm 2:7) and the Spirit-anointed leader predicted by the prophets (cf Isaiah 42:1). Jesus is next driven by the Spirit into the wilderness (Matthew 4:1). After fasting for forty days, Jesus' recently announced status as the Son of God is put to the test (Matthew 4:3, 6). Just as Israel, God's son, was tested in the wilderness for a period of forty, so here Jesus is linked with Israel by being tempted or tested in the wilderness after fasting for a period of forty.²³

Jesus responds to all three temptations from Satan by quoting Deuteronomy. The first temptation, to turn stones into bread, serves as a paradigmatic encounter that informs the remaining temptations. Here Jesus cites Deuteronomy 8:3, yet observing the context of this quote will show why this particular reference is so important:

Remember that the LORD your God led you on the entire journey these forty years in the wilderness, so that he might humble²⁴ you and *test* you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you and your ancestors had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 8:2-3) [emphasis added]

Jesus is being tested²⁵ just as Israel was tested. Yet Jesus recognizes that the purpose of this testing is to produce humility and dependence on God's word. It is not surprising, then, that Jesus will later quote from Deuteronomy 6 when responding to Satan. This section (Deuteronomy 6-8) serves as the core of Moses' three speeches in Deuteronomy calling on Israel to love and obey God. Jesus has internalized the message and learned the lesson that Israel did not. The teaching of Moses, which Israel was repeatedly told to hear and do, is now being heard and done by Jesus.

The Greatest Commandment

During the final week of Jesus' ministry, he was questioned by an expert in the law concerning the most important command (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34). Here Jesus recites a combination of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18 to state that the law is summed up as loving God whole-heartedly and loving one's neighbor as oneself. Both Matthew and Mark present this as the final question Jesus receives, and both register the approval of the crowd while

²³ Dale Allison and W.D. Davies, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, Volume 1, (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 358-89.

²⁴ Some argue that the Hebrew here (עָנָה) could even be translated as "made you to fast." Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 118; Allison and Davies, 359. Cf Lev 23:27, 29, 32; Ps 35:13.

²⁵ The LXX here based on the *πειρα* root, which is the same root used in the "temptation" of Jesus. See the section on "Echoes of Testing" below for a fuller discussion.

Mark also relates the favorable response of the scribe.²⁶ For Jesus, then, Deuteronomy 6 summed up the general message of the Old Testament by demanding love for God, which would have been understood in its original context to be a complete loyalty to God and obedience to his divine word.

The Sermon on the Mount

One further connection between Jesus and Deuteronomy worth noting is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Matthew's presentation of the sermon recalls the giving of the law on Sinai.²⁷ Throughout the Sermon Jesus' teaching is shown to be superior to the teaching of Moses ("you have heard it said..." "but I say to you..." Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39). Yet Jesus is not nullifying the law of Moses, but rather bringing it to its fullness (Matthew 5:17-20). It is also worth noting that the ending of the sermon echoes the frequent charge of Deuteronomy to hear and do God's Word.²⁸ Yet whereas Moses repeatedly told Israel that they were to hear so that they might be careful to do the law of God, Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount by telling those present that they are wise if they will hear and do *his* words (Matthew 7:24-27).²⁹

James and Jesus

James almost never directly cites the teachings of Jesus,³⁰ but he does make frequent allusion to the teaching of Jesus. Assessments vary widely as to how exactly how many allusions to Jesus can be found in James.³¹ Part of the difficulty is that as a wisdom writer, James does not

²⁶ Mark in general appears to have a stronger emphasis on the *Shema* throughout his entire gospel. See Ben Hicks, "A Narrative Analysis of Mark's Use of the *Shema*" *Perichoresis* 24, no. 1 (2026): 56-72.

²⁷ Allison and Davies, *Matthew*, 423-24; Seth Postell, *The Art of Narrative Analogy: Identifying and Interpreting Parallel Passages in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025), 73-83.

²⁸ This language appears in Deuteronomy 4:1; 5:1, 27; 6:3; 7:12; 12:28; 13:19; 15:5; 27:10; 28:1, 15; 30:8, 12-13; 31:12.

²⁹ Allison and Davies rightly point out the importance that these are Jesus' words: "Note the emphatic placement of the personal pronoun ('my words' = Jesus' words; cf. 16:18) and the additional emphasis contributed by τοῦτου (= these words in the sermon on the mount). (On Jesus' lips, 'my words' will have embraced his entire message; cf. Mk 8:38.)" *Matthew*, 720.

³⁰ The one exception to this appears to be James 5:12, which is a clear allusion to Matthew 5:34-37. Although James has condensed and slightly modified some of the language of Jesus, he is clearly dependent on the dominical saying. For a fuller discussion, see Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 189-90.

³¹ Kloppenborg, "Jesus Tradition in James," 71-100; Luke Timothy Johnson and Wesley Wachob, "The Sayings of Jesus in the Letter of James," in *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God: Studies in the Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 136-54; Richard Bauckham, "James and Jesus Traditions," in *Reading the Epistle of James: A Resource for Students*, ed. Eric Farrel Mason and Darian R. Lockett, *Resources for Biblical Study* 94 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 9-26; Wesley Hiram Wachob, *The Voice of Jesus in the*

always rigidly reproduce his source. Instead, he often paraphrases his source material,³² making it difficult to get an accurate count. While debate will no doubt continue over the exact number of allusions to Jesus' teaching, many scholars have concluded that the teaching ministry of Jesus had a profoundly shaping influence on James. A study of James's use of the *Shema*, then, should also investigate how James's understanding of these themes would have been colored by the teaching of Jesus.

The *Shema* in the Letter of James

This study proposes that theology of the *Shema* holds great importance for James. Having observed the way that the Jesus tradition interacted with Deuteronomic themes, attention will be given to investigating several proposed allusions and echoes to Deuteronomy in James. This will include references to monotheism, whole-hearted devotion, perfection, testing, and hearing and doing.

Echoes of Monotheism

The most obvious allusion to the *Shema* in the letter of James comes in James 2:19, where James sarcastically commends the one who believes that "God is one". James 4:12 also has intratextual lexical ties to James 2:19 and other earlier material in James. James's purpose in both these passages is to call for a proper ethical response to the one God, as the *Shema* itself did.

James 2:19

James 2:19 is widely accepted as an allusion to the *Shema*. Although there are some differences between this verse and the LXX of Deuteronomy 6:4, these are the types of variations one expects to find with an allusion.³³ James's alludes to this text to show that a correct understanding of God, even if it is of the most basic and essential nature, is no replacement for right action.³⁴ The Jews prided themselves on their rejection of polytheism, yet for James even mental assent to this truth was no substitute for obedient action.

Social Rhetoric of James, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 106 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³² See the discussion in footnote 6 above.

³³ The LXX of Deut 6:4 states κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστίν, whereas the NA²⁸ of Jas 2:19 has εἷς ἐστίν ὁ θεός. James appears to have rearranged the sentence so that the subject comes last, giving place of emphasis instead to the numeral "one." He has also replaced κύριος "Lord" with ὁ θεός "God," which is in line with second temple Jewish polemics against pagan pantheism. See Baron, *The Shema in John's Gospel*, 53.

³⁴ Douglas Moo uses a helpful analogy when he states "Proclaiming that 'God is one' in that context would have been similar to churchgoers today loudly proclaiming their belief in the deity of Christ." *The Letter of James*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), 164.

While there are important textual issues with this verse,³⁵ the main question is whether θεός has the article. With the article, “God” is the subject of the sentence which would then be translated “God is one.” Without the article, “God” would be the predicate noun of an implied subject, and the translation would be “There is one God.”³⁶ Despite the presence of a few impressive witnesses to the anarthrous θεός,³⁷ retaining the definite article continues to be the more likely reading. The tentative consensus of εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός (“God is one”) enjoys the greatest textual support and coheres the most closely to the LXX of Deuteronomy 6:4.³⁸

At this point, it is worth asking what Deuteronomy itself meant when it stated that “Yahweh is one.”³⁹ If James is deeply influenced by the *Shema*, then understanding the theological claim of Deuteronomy 6:4 is important for tracing what he is doing in his letter. While many take this as simply a rejection of pagan deities, the meaning of the Hebrew text is not so unambiguous. Numerous suggestions have been given about how to understand the Hebrew phrase אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה or, woodenly translated, “The Lord | our God | the Lord | one.”⁴⁰ The three most common interpretations are that this is a reference to (1) the incomparability of God,⁴¹ (2) the faithfulness of God,⁴² or (3) the expectation that God was to be the only one for Israel.⁴³ All three interpretations make sense as a ground for the following call to

³⁵ In its apparatus, NA28 gives seven possible readings for the phrase translated typically translated “God is one”. UBS5 gives the same text as NA28 (εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός) but gives the reading a B rating, meaning some uncertainty exists among the translation committee.

³⁶ Yet even this distinction, which is not meaningless, must not be overemphasized. Christopher Bruno argues that such terms were often used interchangeably in the Second Temple period. *‘God Is One’: The Function of ‘Eis To Theos’ as a Ground for Gentile Inclusion in Paul’s Letters* (New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013), 67.

³⁷ Most notably, Vaticanus omits the article. Other witnesses include a couple minuscules from the tenth century (1611, 1739) and one from the thirteenth (1852), a tenth century majuscule (Ψ), and the church father Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373).

³⁸ Roger L. Omanson, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s “Textual Commentary” for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2015), 472.

³⁹ The translation of Deuteronomy 6:4 is hotly debated. For the case that it should be translated “The Lord is one” see James Robson, *Deuteronomy I–II*, A Handbook on the Hebrew Text, ed. W. Dennis Tucker Jr. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 214.

⁴⁰ For an example of this variety, see Eugene B. Borowitz, ed., *Eḥad: The Many Meanings of God Is One* (Port Washington: Sh’ma, 1988). This short book shares the work of 26 Jewish scholars who provide varying interpretations of what the phrase “God is One” means.

⁴¹ S.R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 90; Matthew Simpson, “A Case for the Traditional Translation of the *Shema*,” Hear, O Israel: The Lord Our God, the Lord Is One,” (PhD. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 167-175.

⁴² J. Gerald Janzen, “On the Most Important Word in the Shema (Deuteronomy VI 4-5),” *VT* 37 (1987)

⁴³ Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of “Monotheism”* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 74-75; R.W.L. Moberly, “Toward an Interpretation of the Shema,” in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, ed. Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 132-133.

love God⁴⁴ and all three can demonstrate examples of ἓς being used in similar ways in the Old Testament.⁴⁵ Given such a situation the best solution is to see the numeral “one” as intentionally chosen for its broad semantic range and multivalent usage. This is significant because throughout James, the importance of God’s faithfulness and integrity (James 1:17; cf 1:5⁴⁶), as well as his desire for exclusive allegiance (James 4:1-4) are both emphasized.

James 4:11-12

James 4:12 also alludes to God’s oneness. The mere use of the word “one” to describe God would be insufficient grounds for suggesting an allusion, but additional reasons for seeing an allusion here exist. The Greek of James 2:19 and James 4:12 shows that the underlying structures for the phrases “God is one” and “there is one lawgiver and judge” are parallel.

εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, (James 2:19)

“one is the God”

εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ νομοθέτης καὶ κριτὴς (James 4:12)

“one is the lawgiver and judge”

Beyond this structural parallel, there are numerous lexical ties between James 4:11-12 and the opening discourse in James 2:1-13, which appears to be matched with James 2:14-26. This overlap of vocabulary includes terms such as “neighbor” (πλησίον, cf James 2:8; Leviticus 19:18), “law” (νόμος, cf James 2:8-12)⁴⁷ and “judgment” (κρίνω/κρίσις, cf James 2:12-13). Thus James 4:11-12 has ties to both opening discourses in the letter of James (2:1-13, 14-26).⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Those who see this as a statement about God’s incomparability see this as the grounds for loving God, since he is entirely unlike anyone or anything else in creation. Those who believe this refers to God’s faithfulness will see that faithfulness as the grounds for God calling on Israel to love him. Obviously, those who believe that this is a call to a unique relationship with God, that he is one in the sense of the only one for Israel, will naturally understand this to lead to the command for Israel to love him.

⁴⁵ Proponents of the interpretation that God’s oneness refers to his incomparability refer to texts such as Zechariah 14:9, those who believe it refers to his faithfulness will cite Job 23:13-14, and those who see in it a call for Israel’s loyalty will reference Song of Solomon 6:9.

⁴⁶ If ἀπλῶς is understood as “sincerely” rather than “freely,” then this verse would also express the firmness of God’s character. Zmijewski argues for this in “Christliche ‘Vollkommenheit’” where he takes this attribute of God as paradigmatic for James when he summarizes the theme as “If God is undivided (*haplos*), then faith should appear undivided (*dipsuchos*).”

⁴⁷ With the exception of James 1:25, the only uses of νόμος in James are limited to these two passages, with 5 instances in James 2:8-12 and 4 instances in 4:11-12. James 4:12 also includes the related νομοθέτης (“law-giver”) when referring to God.

⁴⁸ Other scholars to note connections between James 4:11-12 and the *Shema* include Taylor, *Text-Linguistic Investigation*, 109-15; Tan, “James and the *Shema*,” 121-3; Cheung, *Genre, Composition, and Hermeneutics*, 187; Allison, *James*, 637.

Such a reading may help explain the discourse function of the strangely short unit found in these two verses, sandwiched by much longer units on either side (e.g., 2:1-13; 2:14-26; 3:1-12; 3:13-18; 4:1-10; 4:13-17; 5:1-6; 5:7-11). In James, aphorisms can serve as transitions,⁴⁹ and it is likely that this unusually short unit is doing just that. Given the strong connections with chapter 2 around the themes of loving neighbor, law, judgment, and the one God, James 4:11-12 can be seen as closing an extended section of the letter introduced in 2:1-13 and including 2:14-26; 3:1-12; 3:13-18; 4:1-10.⁵⁰ This is further strengthened by the observation that these sections address the related themes of favoritism, integrity, speech, and division, issues which involve right interactions within the community. After 4:11-12, the focus shifts to warnings to the wealthy (4:13-17; 5:1-6) and then to a call for endurance (5:7-11).

Echoes of Whole-Hearted Devotion

In Deuteronomy, the great monotheistic call of the *Shema* (6:4) was immediately followed by a call for whole-hearted love to Yahweh (6:5). This theme of love for God, particularly with the entirety of the person, echoes throughout the book of James. Twice James refers to those who love God (James 1:12; 2:5), and throughout his letter James is concerned that believers give wholehearted devotion to God.

James 1:12; 2:5

Loving God is a major theme in Scripture, so some might argue that a reference to loving God should not be narrowly read as an allusion to the *Shema*. While this is true, three factors argue for reading these as potential allusions to the *Shema*. First, other allusions to Deuteronomy 6-8 within the letter of James increase the likelihood of an allusion here. Second, James's use of Jesus' command to love neighbor and the oneness God in James 2 and James 4:11-12 increases the likelihood that references to the love of God have the *Shema* as their background.

Finally, both verses include other Deuteronomic themes which increase the likelihood that the *Shema* was in mind when James composed these verses. In both verses, the one loving God is the recipient of blessing or eschatological reward. James 1:12 proclaims a blessing on those who endure testing and promises the crown of life to those who love God. Blessing and life are both major themes that repeat throughout Deuteronomy.⁵¹ James 2:5 opens with a call to "hear," which of course echoes the opening word of the *Shema*. This text also promises that those who love God will be "inheritors (κληρονόμους) the kingdom," which mimics the language of

⁴⁹ Bauckham, *James*, 65-66; Taylor, *Text-Linguistic Investigation*, 83-4.

⁵⁰ Taylor, *Text-Linguistic Investigation*, 107.

⁵¹ In Deuteronomy, the words "blessing" (בְּרָכָה) and "bless" (ברך) occur a combined 51 times and the words "life" (חַיִּים), "living" (חַי) and "live" (חיה) occur a combined 40 times.

Deuteronomy calling on Israel to “possess” the land.⁵² Beyond the mere use of the word “love,” there are clearly themes running throughout these verses that find their fountainhead in the book of Deuteronomy.

James 1:2-4

James’s goal in writing his letter is laid out in the verses immediately following his greeting (Jas 1:2–4). Here the author instructs his listeners to respond joyfully to tests, knowing that such tests produce endurance which ultimately results in a person being “perfect” (τέλειος) and “complete” (όλόκληρος). This language of perfection or wholeness is found throughout the letter.⁵³ Furthermore, this concept of wholeness or perfection has increasingly been seen as the unifying theme for the various topics James addresses.⁵⁴ Along this line it is interesting to note that the word “complete” (όλόκληρος) in the Greek is a compound consisting of the roots “all, whole” (ολος) and “parts” (κληρος). The LXX of Deuteronomy 6:5 emphasizes that Israel is to love God with “all” (όλος) their heart, “all” their soul, and “all” their might. If intentional, this would link James’s view that trials produce mature character with the call of the *Shema* to love God wholeheartedly.

James 1:8; 4:8

James appears to be the first writer to use the term “double-minded” (δίψυχος), although δι- compounds were used by other writers.⁵⁵ The coining of this word may reflect a Deuteronomic influence, as the “soul” (ψυχή) is one of the parts that is supposed to be totally dedicated to God.⁵⁶ The opposite of loving God with all one’s soul, then, would be to be “dual-souled.” This would mean loving God with only part of one’s soul and loving someone or something else with the rest.

⁵² See, for example, Deuteronomy 6:1 where the Hebrew ירש is translated using κληρονομέω. The κληρος root occurs over 100 times throughout the book of Deuteronomy, once again indicating a major theme.

⁵³ Word with the τελ- root appear at strategic points throughout the letter, reinforcing the importance of this theme for James (1:15, 17, 25; 2:8, 22; 3:2; 5:11).

⁵⁴ Scholars who see perfection or wholeness as a major if not the major theme of James include Moo, *James*, 46; Darian Lockett, “Wholeness in Intertextual Perspective: James’ Use of Scripture in Developing a Theme,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 15, no. 2 (2016): 93–94; Patrick Hartin, “Call to Be Perfect through Suffering (James 1,2–4): The Concept of Perfection in the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount,” *Biblica* 77, no. 4 (1996): 477–92; Rudolf Hoppe, *Der theologische Hintergrund des Jakobusbriefes* (Würzburg: Echter, 1977); Josef Zmijewski, “Christliche ‘Vollkommenheit’” *Studeien Zum Neuen Testament Und Seiner Umwelt* 5 (1980): 50–70; Frankenmölle Hubert, “Das semantische Netz des Jakobusbriefes: Zur Einheit eines umstritten Briefes,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 34 (1990): 161–97

⁵⁵ Stanley Porter, “Is *Dipsuchos* (James 1,8; 4,8) a ‘Christian’ Word?,” *Biblica* 71, no. 4 (1990): 469–98

⁵⁶ Scholars who note this overlap include Allison, *James*, 187; Davids, *James*, 74; Moo, *James*, PNTC, 83–84; Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary 48 (Waco: Word Books, 1988), 20; Cheung, *Genre, Composition, and Hermeneutics*, 199.

While this term is used only twice in James, in many ways it encapsulates James's primary concern in the letter. If James's overarching goal is that members of the Christian community be wholly dedicated to God, then the opposite of complete dedication would be being double-minded. Indeed, many of the issues in James addresses are various forms of hypocrisy, the state of being "dual-souled." These would include showing favoritism (2:1-13), having faith without works (2:14-26), blessing God while cursing man (3:1-12), claiming to be wise while living selfishly (3:13-18), and being a friend of the world yet claiming to love God (4:1-10).

Echoes of Testing

In Deuteronomy, whole-hearted obedience is addressed in the context of tests of loyalty that Israel will face in the land.⁵⁷ It is not surprising, then, that when Jesus was faced with his own test in the wilderness, he repeatedly quotes Deuteronomy. Throughout the first half of James 1, the letter pays special attention to testing, as is seen in the repeated use of πειρα root.⁵⁸ The goal of whole-hearted, loving obedience is necessitated by the tests that the people of God will face.

Testing in Deuteronomy

Immediately after crossing the Red Sea, God twice tested Israel: (1) by bringing them to a fountain of bitter water (Exodus 15:25) and (2) by sending them Mannah (Exodus 16:4). Shortly thereafter Israel ran out of water and quarreled with God, testing him (Exodus 17:1-2, 7). A pattern thus emerges where God tests his people, and rather than responding with humility they quarrel with him and test him. Moses references both accounts in Deuteronomy. He first warns Israel not to test the Lord as they did at Massah⁵⁹ (Deut. 6:16, cf. Exo 17:1-2, 7), and he later reminds them that Mannah was part of God's testing designed to develop their character (לְמַעַן עֲנֶה לָּךְ "so that he might humble you" Deut. 8:2) and to reveal it (לִדְעוֹת אֶת-אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְכֶּם "to know what is in your heart" Deut. 8:2). Later in Deuteronomy Moses points forward to the future when false prophets performing signs and wonders will encourage Israel to apostatize from Yahweh. Israel

⁵⁷ Daniel Block argues that Deuteronomy 6-8 is a unit dealing with tests that Israel will face once in the land of Canaan. See his most recent work in *Hearing the Gospel According to Moses: A Commentary on Deuteronomy (Volume 1)* (Hong Kong; Inspirata Publishing, 2023), 219-298.

⁵⁸ Modern English translations often obscure this thematic connection by translating the πειρα- root as either "temptation" or "trial." Although on one level this is a defensible translation, since the Greek word covers both semantic domains and likely the exact semantic reference shifts throughout the chapter, such a translation obscures the thematic connection. To help the reader see how this theme is developed canonically, the word "test" will be used throughout. Both temptations and trials are ultimately tests, from within (temptation) or from without (trial).

⁵⁹ Massah is a toponym which means "Testing."

is not to listen to these prophets, instead recognizing that God is testing them to see if they love God “with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 13:3).

Testing in the Jesus Tradition

The testing of Jesus provides an interesting advance on this theme. As noted previously, Jesus is tested for a period of forty in the desert, and he quotes from Deuteronomy 6-8 three times to refute these temptations. But it is also noteworthy that in this case, the testing does not come directly from God. Rather, the Spirit leads to Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1-2). This is important because here the testing Jesus faces is by God, yet Satan is the immediate agent of testing, rather than God himself.

Testing in James

James 1 is the only chapter to use the language of testing (1:2, 12, 13, 14). This is unusual for James, who often takes ideas and themes from the first chapter and repeats them throughout the letter.⁶⁰ This unique focus at the beginning suggests the paradigmatic role these verses play. The language of testing falls away because the rest of the book shows the various tests that believers will face, both internal and external, while attempting to live a life of faith.

The first two instances of the *πειρα*- root in James (1:2, 12) address tests that come from without (trials). Much like the testing that Israel faced, James instructs his reader that these tests are good because they refine the believer’s character. Furthermore, those who endure the tests will receive the eschatological blessing of life (1:12), in contrast to the fleeting wealth of this world (1:9-11).

James 1:13-15 is a challenging passage, as it would seem at first to contradict the theme of testing developed thus far. This text states that “God Himself tests no one” (*πειράζει δὲ αὐτὸς οὐδέν*, Jas 1:13), yet God tested Israel and Abraham (cf. Gen 22:1). How then can James say that God does not test when the Jewish Scriptures state the opposite on several occasions? Some suggest that there is a difference between the God testing for our good and our own desires or even Satan testing for our destruction.⁶¹ This distinction is reflected in most English translations, which smooth over this apparent contradiction by translating *πειράζει* in James 1:13 as “tempt” while translating other instances of the word with God as the subject as “test.” Yet is there an exegetical basis for this argument?

The answer here is twofold. First, the earlier qualification that God cannot be tempted *κακῶν* (“of/with evil things”) (1:13b) is likely implied in the final section of the verse. God does

⁶⁰ For example, law (1:25; 2:8-12; 4:11-12), speech (1:26; 3:1-12; 4:11-12), faith (1:3, 6; 2:1, 5, 14-26; 5:15), wisdom (1:5; 3:13-18), wealth (1:9-11; 2:1-13; 5:1-6), perfection (1:4, 17, 25; 2:8, 22; 3:2), endurance (1:3-4; 5:11).

⁶¹ Moo, *James*, PNTC, 71–72; Davids, *James*, 81; Johnson, *James*, 203–04.

not test “with evil things.” Rather such, tests come from within. Second, the emphatic reflexive pronoun “himself” (αὐτὸς) clarifies that such tests do not come directly from God. In using such precise language, James does leave open the possibility that temptation to evil can come indirectly from God.⁶² It is possible to see the testing narrative of Jesus is behind this qualification. There the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness so that he would be tested (Matt 4:1; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1–2). This might lie behind the wording in the Lord’s prayer that God not “lead one into temptation” (καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν, cf. Matt 6:13; Luke 11:4) This reading is further strengthened if one understands ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ in Matt 6:13 as “but deliver us from the evil one [i.e., Satan].”

It is possible that the reason for this statement is that some Christians had used this teaching from both the testing of Jesus and the Lord’s Prayer and to blame God for their sin.⁶³ James makes clear that the ultimate culprit for such testing is not God, or even the devil. Instead, James argues the true source of sin is human desire, a fact for which neither God nor ultimately even the devil can be blamed.⁶⁴ In so doing he is following the example of Jesus, who understood Deuteronomy 6–8 to show a God who tested for the good of his people and who gave the help needed to overcome the tests. Jesus did not blame God for the tests, but instead overcame them by listening to God’s word.

Echoes of Hearing and Doing

If wholeness is achieved by enduring the external and internal tests of life, how should such wholeness be achieved? James follows the same plan for spiritual formation that was laid out by Moses in Deuteronomy. The *Shema* moves from a statement about the nature of God (6:4), to a call for wholehearted devotion to God (6:5), to the means by which that devotion was to be achieved: meditating on God’s words (6:6-9). This taps into a much larger theme in Deuteronomy where Israel is called upon to listen carefully to the words of the law so that they would carefully do them.⁶⁵

⁶² Davids, *James*, 83.

⁶³ Davids, *James*, 81; cf also J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967), 104; James Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 69.

⁶⁴ James will later recognize the role of malevolent spiritual forces in 3:15 and 4:7. Here, however, his focus is on the sinful desires upon which the demons and the devil must work. To put it bluntly, the underlying logic of James in this passage goes something like, “The devil cannot make you sin. You sin because you want to. If you did not want to sin, the devil would be powerless.”

⁶⁵ David Deuel has outlined a chain of verbs that gives the Deuteronomic vision for spiritual growth: “gather (לקח), read (קרא), hear (שמע), learn (למד), fear (ירא), worship (השתחוה), obey (שמע + ל/בקול) and teach (למד).” For Deuel, while Deuteronomy also includes the activities of learning, fearing, and worshipping before obeying, he nonetheless recognizes that this is an expansion on the frequent scriptural command to “hear and do/obey.” David Deuel, “‘Read This Torah’ (Deuteronomy 31:11): The Importance and Function of Israel’s Primary Scripture in Early Spiritual Growth,” in *Write That They May Read: Studies in Literacy and Textualization in the*

Jesus utilizes this theme on several occasions in his ministry. Jesus tells those who hear the Sermon on the Mount that they will be blessed if they hear (ἀκούω) and do (ποιέω) his words (Matthew 7:24). Further, Jesus explains the parable of the wheat and tares as referring to those who hear (ἀκούω) the word of the kingdom (Matthew 13:18-19). The various soils refer to different ways the word of the kingdom is received, with the final group representing those who act on what they hear and thus bear fruit (καρποφορέω) and produce (ποιέω) (Matthew 13:23).⁶⁶

James inherits this tradition of hearing and doing the word from Moses as interpreted through the lens of the Jesus tradition. After discussing the importance of tests (Jas 1:2-17), James points his readers to the word by which they were born (Jas 1:18). He then encourages them to be ready to hear the word (Jas 1:19-20)⁶⁷ and to receive it with purity and meekness (1:21). Word here is likely a dual reference to the teachings of Jesus and what have come to be known as the Old Testament Scriptures.⁶⁸ James next discusses the importance of both hearing and doing the word (1:22-25). In these verses James creatively expands on the instruction of Moses and Jesus to be hearers and doers of the word by warning about the dangers and folly of hearing the divine word but not being obedient to it.

Conclusion

James demonstrates an awareness and a careful interaction with both the Old Testament and the teaching of Jesus. Given the prominence of the *Shema* in both corpuses, it is therefore not surprising that themes developed by the *Shema* and its broader context (Deuteronomy 6-8) would play an outsized role in the theology of James's letter. James sees the Christian life as a series of tests which must be faced, as was the case for both Israel and Jesus. The goal for the believer amid these tests should be to endure them by hearing God's Word and being careful to follow what it says. Failure in this regard will result in a double-mindedness that desires to obey God but also seeks its own desires and the friendship of the world. Following the example of Christ, however, will result in the believer developing a whole-hearted devotion to God, resulting in a character that is perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Ancient near East and in the Hebrew Scriptures, ed. Daniel Block et al. (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 294–310.

⁶⁶ These connections were observed by Birger Gerhardsson, "The Parable of the Sower and Its Interpretation," in *The Shema in the New Testament*, 24–52. While Gerhardsson likely overinterprets the significance of these parallels to the *Shema*, his work in pointing out the thematic and linguistic parallels is helpful.

⁶⁷ The view that the threefold imperatives of 1:19: "be ready to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" is primarily focused on the issue of hearing the word can be seen by the way it is sandwiched in the context between references to the word (1:18, 21). See Dan McCartney, *James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 115.

⁶⁸ Moo, *James*, 105; Cheung, *Genre, Composition, and Hermeneutics*, 87–88.