

23. Epistles of James and Jude

Counsel from “the brothers of the Lord”

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? . . . Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.” (2:14–18)

“Have I Done Any Good?” (hymn no. 223)

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. . . . Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:27)

1. Have I done any good in the world today?
Have I helped anyone in need?
Have I cheered up the sad and made someone feel glad?
If not, I have failed indeed.
Has anyone’s burden been lighter today
Because I was willing to share?
Have the sick and the weary been helped on their way?
When they needed my help was I there?

2. There are chances for work all around just now,
Opportunities right in our way.
Do not let them pass by, saying, “Sometime I’ll try,”
But go and do something today.
‘Tis noble of man to work and to give;
Love’s labor has merit alone.
Only he who does something helps others to live.
To God each good work will be known.

(Chorus)
Then wake up and do something more
Than dream of your mansion above.
Doing good is a pleasure, a joy beyond measure,
A blessing of duty and love.

The General “Epistle” of James

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*THE ROLE OF WISDOM IN TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS.
 PRACTICAL RELIGION: WORDS AND DEEDS. FAITH AND WORKS.
 SINS OF SPEECH: TAMING THE TONGUE. JAMES AND THE “JESUS
 TRADITION.” PRAYER OF FAITH.*

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Background of the “Epistle” of James

- **Authorship:** From “**James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ**”
 - Not likely to be James the son of Zebedee (brother of John) or James the son of Alphaeus (perhaps James the Less)
 - Traditionally attributed to **James the Just**, “**the brother of the Lord**”
 - Known as “the just” because of his apparent adherence to Jewish law
 - Modest about his relationship with Jesus
- **Date:** If by James the Just, **before A.D. 62**, when he was executed by the Sanhedrin
 - An early date is further supported by its lack of sophisticated theology, its practical OT morality, and its strong echoes of **the teachings of Jesus** that seem to come **from an oral tradition** rather than the later canonical gospels.
- **Place:** **A Palestinian origin** seems probable
 - The letter’s traditional association **with James the Just**, who led the church in Jerusalem
 - **References to the climate and agriculture of the holy land**
- **Audience:** “To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad”
 - Apparently to **Jewish Christians of the Diaspora** (or after the scattering of the Jerusalem Church in Acts 8:1), **although it could refer to the Church as a whole as “New Israel” (cf. today’s lineage in patriarchal blessings)**

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Genre and Focus

- Shaped in **letter** format only in its opening (1:1)
- Overall a **homily**
 - based on scriptural references
 - Based also on the teachings of Jesus
 - Provides a witness to the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount independent of Matthew
 - frequently employing the diatribe style
- Focuses on practical religion
 - somewhat in the tradition of Old Testament **Wisdom Literature**
 - Topics include testing, economic behavior, speech and interpersonal interactions, endurance, and encouragement
- “An epistle of straw . . .” (Martin Luther)
 - Martin Luther disliked James both for its emphasis on works (more below) and its lack of explicit Christology (the person and works of Jesus)
 - Only two direct references to Jesus!
 - “James, a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ . . .” (1:1)
 - “Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . with respect to persons.” (2:1)

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Summary

Many short topics rather than a carefully organized letter or treatise

- **Epistolary Introduction (1:1)**
- **The Role of Testing (1:2–18)**
- **Practical Religion: Words and Deeds (1:19–27)**
- Poverty and Generosity (2:1–26)
 - Warnings Against Partiality to the Rich (2:1–9)
 - Fulfilling the Whole Law (2:10–13)
 - Faith and Works (2:14–26)
- **Demand for Pure Speech (3:1–4:12)**
 - Taming the Tongue (3:1–12)
 - True Wisdom (3:13–18)
- Worldliness and Wrongful Desires (4:1–10)
- Warning Against Judging One Another (4:11–12)
- **Testing through Wealth (4:13–5:6)**
 - Arrogant Self-confidence (4:13–16)
 - Sins of Omission (4:17)
 - Warning to the Rich (5:1–6)
- **Closing Encouragement (5:7–20)**
 - Patience in Suffering (5:7–11)
 - Sin of Swearing (5:12)
 - **Prayer of Faith (5:13–18)**
 - Recall of the Erring (5:19–20)

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James and the “Jesus Tradition”

- Although James was **written before the gospels**, it nonetheless preserves much of **the oral tradition of the teachings of Jesus**
- Compare the following passages of James with Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount
 - “If any of you lacks wisdom, **let him ask of God**, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” (1:5)
 - “Ask, and it shall be given you” (Matt 5:7)
 - “But **be doers of the word, and not hearers only**, deceiving yourselves.” (1:22)
 - “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them . . .” (Matt 7:24)
 - “Do you not know that **friendship with the world is enmity with God?**” (4:4)
 - “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” (6:24)
 - “Beloved, **do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged.**” (5:9 NRSV)
 - “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” (Matt 7:1)
 - But above all things, my brethren, **swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth**, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and *your* nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.” (5:12)
 - “But I say to you, **Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth . . .** Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’” (Matt 5:34-37)

The Role of Wisdom in Trials and Temptations (1:2–18)

- “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, **because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance**. Perseverance must finish its work so that **you may be mature (teleoi) and complete**, not lacking anything.” (1:2–4, NIV)
 - **Teleoi, from the the same word as Matthew 5:38!**
- “**Any of you who lacks wisdom must ask God**, who gives to all generously and without scolding; it will be given. But the prayer must be made with faith, and no trace of doubt, because a person who has doubts is like the waves thrown up in the sea by the buffeting of the wind. **That sort of person, in two minds, inconsistent in every activity, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.**” (1:5–8 NJB)
 - **Wisdom is often defined as the correct use of knowledge**
 - **Wisdom is also associated with age and experience . . . Trials and temptations give us wisdom, and wisdom helps us weather trials and temptations!**
- “**Blessed is anyone who endures temptation [or a trial, Greek, peirasmon]**. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. No one, when tempted, should say, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. **But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it.**” (1:12–14 NRSV)

Practical Religion: Words and Deeds (1:19–27)

- “You must understand this, my beloved: **let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger**; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.” (1:19–21 NRSV)
- “But **be doers of the word, and not hearers only**, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.” (1:22–24 NKJV)
- “If any man among you seem to be religious, and **bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.**” (1:26–27)
 - *Segue into the discussion of Poverty and Generosity (2:1–26)*

“Have not faith with respect to persons . . .”

- “My brethren, **have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.**” (2:1)
 - “My brothers, **do not let class distinction** enter into your faith in Jesus Christ, our glorified Lord.” (NJB)
 - *The result of our belief in Jesus should be charity for all without partiality . . .*
 - “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,’ ye do well: **But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.**” (2:8–9)
- Context for the “Faith and Works” discussion that follows
 - “**What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?**” (2:14–16)
 - Can faith save him? The person with the faith of the person needing help?
 - *While James does ask whether faith alone can “save” (sōsai), the examples that immediately follow refer to the immediate rescuing or curing the condition of the hungry and poor, suggesting that he is concerned with more than simply a spiritual state*
 - James’ practical religion focused on **good deeds motivated by love or “works of charity”**

Faith and Works (2:14–26)

- **“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? . . . Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.** Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.” (2:14–18)
 - The issue is raised with a question in the **diatribe** format
 - **No direct evidence that Paul and James knew or had each other’s writings—not a case of “intertextual dialogue!”**
 - If James is responding to Paul, James *seems* to be reacting not so much to Paul’s actual teaching (Gal 2:16, Rom 3:28) but **is correcting how it may have been misinterpreted by others**
 - **Paul had addressed “works of the [Mosaic] law”**
 - Again, James’ practical religion focused on **good deeds motivated by love or “works of charity”**
 - Defends the idea of **action motivated by faith** by citing the examples of Abraham (2:21–23) and Rahab (2:25)
- “For as the body without the spirit is dead, **so faith without works is dead also.**” (2:26)
 - Luther did not like this! He put James at the end of his New Testament and called it “an epistle of straw!”
 - **How can works without faith likewise be dead?**

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Sins of Speech

Taming the Tongue (3:1–12)

- “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. **If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.** Indeed, **we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us,** and we turn their whole body. Look also at **ships:** although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, **they are turned by a very small rudder** wherever the pilot desires.
- **Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!** And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.
- **But no man can tame the tongue.** It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. **With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing.** My brethren, these things ought not to be so.” (3:1–10 NKJV)

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Prayer of Faith (5:13–18)

- “**Are any among you suffering? They should pray.** Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.” (5:13)
- “Are any among you sick? *They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.* **The prayer of faith will save the sick**, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.” (5:14–15)
- Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. **The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.**” (5:16)
- “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and **he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.** And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.” (5:17–18 NKJV)

The General Epistle of Jude

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*UNGODLY INTRUDERS LEAD JUDE TO CONTEND FOR
 THE FAITH*

Background of the Epistle of Jude

- **Genre:** a **general letter** (“**Catholic**” **epistle**) of **exhortation** not addressed to any particular community but **treating the problem of false teachers** or “**intruders**”
- **Authorship:** “**Jude (Greek for Judas), the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James**”
 - *Perhaps the Greek for of Judas was preferred after the betrayal by and fall of Judas Iscariot*
 - Like James, he is **humble about his family connection with the Savior**
 - “Missionary-apostles,” **the brothers of the Lord were leaders in the Jewish Christian community**, and Jude’s grandsons were still leading the Christians in Palestine in the time of the emperor Trajan (A.D. 98–117, see Euseb. *Eccl Hist* 3.19–20)
- **Date:** no internal indication, anywhere from A.D. 50–100, but perhaps one of the earliest NT documents
- **From/To:** Probably **from the Palestine area** where the brothers of Jesus were important leaders **to Christians influenced by the Jerusalem church**
- **Peculiarity:** frequent use of **non-canonical material**

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Structure of Jude

- **Opening Formula (1:1–2)**
- **Body (1:3–23)**
 - Occasion: Intended to Write about “Our Common Salvation,” but **Ungodly Intruders Have Led Jude to Contend for the Faith** (1:3–4)
 - Three Examples of **Punishment for Disobedience:** Israel in the Wilderness, Angels That Fell, Sodom and Gomorrah (1:5–10)
 - Fallen angels story an expansion of Gen 6:1–4 found in extra-canonical 1 Enoch 6–19
 - False teachers reject and slander authority (1:8–10)
 - Apocryphal story of Michael and the devil contending over Moses’ “body”
 - Three More Examples Illustrating **the Character of the Intruders:** Cain, Balaam, and Korah (1:11–13)
 - Prophecies about the Ungodly Intruders (1:14–19)
 - Including an extra-canonical quotation from 1 Enoch 1:3
 - Reiterated Appeal for Faith (1:20–23)
- **Concluding Formula: Doxology (1:24–25)**

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