

[PDF version of the lesson notes.](#)

I. Introduction

- Today, we move to the epistle of James. This epistle clearly occupies a special place in LDS discourse because of James 1:5. Before we narrow in on specific parts of the letter I want to entertain some big picture questions:

- ◆ *Do you find James to be an enjoyable letter to read? Has it been an influential letter for you personally? Why?*
- ◆ *Do you find the material in James, in general, more applicable to you than the Pauline letters?*
- ◆ *Do you think we are are a "Jamesian" Church? Does that go too far? In what ways might that be both a fair and unfair moniker?*
- ◆ *What are the distinctive features of the letter? How does it differ from other parts of the New Testament? How does it differ from the Pauline letters? How is the letter similar to other books in the New Testament?*
- ◆ *Does the letter remind you of any Old Testament books? Which ones and why?*
- ◆ *Do you think James is an influential book in the modern church separate from James 1:5? For example, do you think there similarities in thought between the Doctrine and Covenants and the book of James*

- **Authorship.** The prescript of the letter indicates that James is the author of the letter:

(1) James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. —James 1:1

James, the brother of Jesus, was the most famous James in early Christianity. However, the author doesn't provide enough details to confirm such and identification. Thus we cannot say with certainty that the author is claiming to be James, the brother of Jesus. On the other hand, James, the brother of Jesus, does seem like a natural candidate because of his importance.

- **Date Written.** Dates range widely based on assumptions or beliefs about authorship (genuine or pseudepigraphic). If James, the brother Jesus, wrote the letter than a date before 60 CE would be likely.[1]

- **Audience.** The letter is addressed to the scattered twelve tribes (Diaspora Jews). This may indicate a specifically Jewish Christian audience.

II. Trials

- Read James 1:2–4:

(2) My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; (3) Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. (4) But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

- The underlying Greek translated as "temptations" in the King James Version can alternatively be translated as "trials." [2] Most Modern translations use "trials" (it really does seem to fit better in this context):

(2) My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, (3) because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; (4) and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. — James 1:2–4 (NRSV)

Note, this is also consistent with the change in the JST (see the JST footnote for verse 2).

- *How should we understand these verses? Does it seem like an imperative to enjoy trials goes too far? Sure, I am on board with the idea that trials are useful, but I am not sure I understand, "consider it nothing but joy?"*
- *Do you think the message here is similar to the beatitudes of Matthew 5:10–12?*

(10) Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. (12) Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

- *What does it mean for "patience to have her perfect work" or "endurance have its full effect?" Do these phrases remind you of other scriptures and/or scriptural images? Does this phrase seem to correspond with important points of emphasis in the modern church? Notice, the use of "endurance" in the modern translation (NRSV)? How does the use of "endurance" affect your understanding of the verse and what James is talking about?*
- *"Verses 3–4 employ the stylistic device of 'climax,' in which the end of one phrase is echoed in the beginning of the next." [3] Why would James use this style? How does it affect the readers attention?*

- *What does it mean to be perfect and entire? Why couple those words together? Does this steer us away from the implication that James is talking about being "flawless?"*

III. Wisdom

- Read James 1:5–8:

(5) If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. (6) But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. (7) For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. (8) A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

- *How are these verses connected with verses 2–4? Do the previous verses help us understand what it means to lack wisdom or do you see these verse as an independent unit?*
- *Do you think having wisdom implies completion or wisdom implies the road to completion? Or do you see the relation between these passages as to loose for that implication?*
- *Do you think that James is contrasting God with us (with humans or people)? Does mentioning the double–mindedness of man emphasize the single–mindedness of God?*
- *Do you think that "wavering" is equivalent to doubting? That would seem to imply a very negative view of doubting? Aren't doubts part of the process and a natural part of being human and living by faith?*

III. The Rich

- Read James 1:9–11:

(9) Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: (10) But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. (11) For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

- *How do these verses emphasize or develop the theme of reversal?*
- *Should we read this as a universal condemnation of the rich?*
- *Does James 5:1–6 and James 2:1–7 give us important context?*

(1) Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall

come upon you. (2) Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. (3) Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. (4) Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. (5) Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. (6) Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

and

(1) My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. (2) For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; (3) And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: (4) Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? (5) Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? (6) But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? (7) Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

- *Do you think verses 9–11 are related to the two earlier passages? Is verse 9 a specific application or instance of verse 2? How is it related to verse 5?*

IV. Father of Lights

- Read James 1:16–18:

(16) Do not err, my beloved brethren. (17) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. (18) Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

- *What does it mean that God is the Father of lights? What does it emphasize and how is related to the rest of verse 17?*
- *What does it mean the God begat us with the word of truth? Why mention that God is our Father and the Father of lights?*
- *What does it mean that God begat us of his own will? Why emphasize God's will in this situation? Is this another point of contrast? Maybe with verse 13–15?*

(13) Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: (14) But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. (15) Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. --James 1:13-15

- *Why does James emphasize that every good gift is from God? Is it related to verses 13-15?*

V. Pure Religion

- Read James 1:16-18:

(26) 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. (27) 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.

- True, False, or Uncertain. Explain. This scripture is at the heart of what it means to be a Latter-Day Saint.
- True, False, or Uncertain. Explain. Ultimately, we cannot have a relationship with God without a commitment to the principles of this scripture (no relationship with God without an elementary ethical commitment to human beings[4]).

Endnotes

1. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1084.
2. Jim Faulconer, Feast Upon the Word Blog.
3. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 910.
4. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1255.