

November 13-19, 2023

James

“BE YE DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT HEARERS ONLY”

Summary: *James 1. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God—Resist temptation—Be doers of the word—James explains how to recognize pure religion.*

James 2. God has chosen the poor of this world who are rich in faith—Salvation is gained by keeping the whole law—Faith without works is dead.

James 3. By governing the tongue, we gain perfection—Heavenly wisdom is pure, peaceable, and full of mercy.

James 4. Wars are born of lusts—The friends of the world are the enemies of God—Sin is failure to walk in the light we have received.

James 5. Misery awaits the wanton rich—Await the Lord’s coming with patience—The elders are to anoint and heal the sick.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

How do I describe pure religion?

The discussion of the first six chapters of Hebrews

suggested that “purpose is preferred over procedure.” This lesson continues to convey the doctrine that true religion is measured by “spiritual and clarity of conscience rather than by systematic calculated cadence.” All too often in organized religion, people mistake motion for success. It is a human tendency to believe that “doing” things takes on more importance than the Godly purpose behind them. The following statement has been highlighted to emphasize the spiritual aspects, “Then what is true religion? James (James in the English Bible is really Jacob in Greek) declares: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:27) “This may be interpreted as meaning that a person who is religious is thoughtful to the unfortunate, and has an inner spirit that

prompts to deeds of kindness and to the leading of a blameless life; who is just, truthful; who does not, as Paul says, think more highly of himself than he ought to think; who is affectionate, patient in tribulation, diligent, cheerful, fervent in spirit, hospitable, merciful; and who abhors evil and cleaves to that which is good. The possession of such a spirit and feeling is a true sign that a person is naturally religious.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, p.121)

Where is the light switch?

“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.” (James 1:17) “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6) The “light” we are talking about is also the light created when God said “Let there be light” on the first day of creation. It is also the spiritual light that existed before the sun, moon and stars

were created related in (**Genesis.1:3-25**) It is the light that brings holiness into the mundane and enables us to overcome the odds to help repair the world (*Tikun Olam*). That same light empowered the *Maccabees* to fight for their religious freedom from the Seleucid Empire (312–64 BCE) more than two thousand years ago. "Light is the overarching, central, definitive metaphor for Jewish understanding of all of reality," says Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf (1957-) "Light in Judaism is so pervasive that it's almost overlooked, like the air we breathe. But once you stop and look, then all of a sudden you say, 'Wow. It's everywhere!'"

(<https://www.jwi.org/articles/get-a-glow-on#:~:text=%22Light%20is%20the%20overarching%2C%20central,like%20the%20air%20we%20breathe.>)

Works or Faith?

Judaism has centered its philosophy on the “do’s” and the “don’ts.” Many a rabbi has instructed that the commandments (*mitzvot*) are more important than the feelings behind them because feelings can be altered. Yet, there seems to be a constant struggle to reach the balance of what Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints call “faith and works.” “The concept of *mitzvot* is central to the Jewish religion. (The Hebrew term for commandments is: *mitzvot* (plural), *mitzvah* (singular). Judaism teaches that Almighty God revealed His will in the *Torah* in the form of *mitzvot* which were interpreted and amplified by the rabbis on the basis of the traditions they had.” “According to rabbinic tradition the *Torah* contains 613 *mitzvot*; 248 of them are positive commandments (the “do” laws, e.g. Honor your father and mother) and 365 are prohibitions (the “don’t” laws, e.g. You shall not eat anything on the Day of Atonement).” “According to classical Judaism, the reason for men to keep the *mitzvot* is that they were commanded by

God. However, Jewish philosophers throughout the ages have tried to find explanations or reasons for the commandments.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

Where does my spiritual path lead me?

“Some people attempted to interpret the *mitzvot* in an allegorical manner suggesting that the idea a particular *mitzvah* represents is the important thing and that as long as the believer is aware of that idea, the *mitzvah* does not have to be observed. This approach is definitely not within the traditional view of Judaism.” “Whatever the reasons for the commandments, it is clear that a person who observes them carefully will constantly be aware of the presence of God in his life. Indeed, the benediction with which the observance of most commandments is to be prefaced explicitly points to its being in conformity with God's will. Judaism insists on belief, faith and good deeds (which are also called *mitzvot*); but by themselves they are not enough. The actual observance of the *mitzvot*, notwithstanding the fact that it may occasionally cause inconvenience, is a prime doctrine of Judaism.” “The prophets cried out against hypocrisy and social injustice, “What does the Lord require of thee: only to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God” (**Micah 6:8**). How similar this is with Apostle James’ definition! That is also one of many passages which sum up the ethical principles which are at the heart of Jewish religion, and which have influenced later religions. “I am the Lord your God Who brought you out from the land of Egypt.’ Belief in God is the fundamental basis of the Jewish religion. Without such a belief Judaism becomes merely a social code of behavior and cannot be described as a religion.” “. . .the mid-19th century . . . outstanding rabbinical authority . . . (Lithuanian) of his day, Israel Lipkin . . . felt that the Jews

were seeing Judaism as a ritualistic religion and were observing the *mitzvot* in a mechanical manner and ignoring the fact that Judaism requires of man to be as good and ethical as he can possibly be. He believed that this could be corrected only by intensive study of texts which discuss the proper behavior required and the way to achieve it; and he inaugurated a movement to make such study an integral part of the curriculum of the yeshivot and to establish a small "*musar* (ethical and spiritual paths) room" in every neighborhood where people would go for a short period every day to "check up on their spiritual well-being." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

How can I better perceive well-being?

Well-being is measured by comparing it to the opposite. The principle of looking at opposites helps us to understand affliction, trials of faith, tribulation, and the difficulties of life. Hence, God in His wisdom lets us experience opposites so that we may learn to be more like Him. Our focus must be on Him or we may lose hope. "One of the most serious challenges to religion is the problem of suffering. If God is all powerful and good, as Judaism claims He is, how is it possible that He allows His creatures to suffer? This is not a new problem. The Bible is aware that suffering and pain are characteristic of human existence and many of the books of the Bible are concerned about the theological issues involved. The Book of Habakkuk, when it deals with one of the aspects of the problem, says that "the righteous man must live by his faith." This seems to mean that it is beyond the ability of human intelligence to understand the question and that man must have faith that God is doing the right thing." "The rabbis of the *Talmud* and the medieval Jewish philosophers were also troubled about the problem of suffering. Some thinkers suggested that the innocent suffer in this

world so that their share in the world to come will be greater, but other philosophers rejected this idea. Another solution suggested was that suffering comes on a man in order to warn him to mend his ways and that "when a man sees that he is suffering, let him examine his deeds." The rabbis of the *Talmud* believed that it is a great religious virtue to bear one's suffering "with love," i.e., patiently and without becoming rebellious." "Whatever the solution to the theological problem of suffering, Judaism absolutely forbids inflicting suffering on other people and even on animals. Also, no man may ignore the suffering of others but must do everything in his power to help remedy the situation. This applies to physical suffering, to poverty and to psychological suffering. Furthermore, no man has the right to enjoy himself if the rest of the community is suffering." ". . . The sufferings of the righteous are also a sort of test, "afflictions of love" which develop in them patience and complete faith. The Book of Job and other biblical sources support this view." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

How can I recognize the difference between poverty and suffering?

"The sages of the *Talmud* spoke of poverty in terms of both good and evil. On the one hand it is seen as an affliction which robs life of its joy and deprives man of the leisure necessary for the study of *Torah*. On the other hand, poverty tests a Jew's faith and induces him to be more pious. It also stimulates generosity and sympathy in others." "Like the prophets, the rabbis were exceedingly perplexed by the problem of the "righteous who suffers." Among the solutions they proffered was one which made reward and punishment applicable both to man's life in this world and his existence in the world to come (*ha-olam ha-ba*). The righteous suffers on earth for the sins he committed, so that his reward in the next

world may be total and complete. The rabbis also developed the notion of *yissurin shel ahavah*, afflictions of love, which explained the suffering of the one who has not sinned as a measure, accorded by God, of increasing the reward of the righteous in the world to come." "In traditional Judaism, the Messiah will be a human being --- albeit it a perfect one --who will come and bring harmony to the world. He will not have a divine aspect other than having been chosen by God for his task. The Hebrew word for Messiah, *mashi'ah*, means "anointed" and indicates that the Messiah has been chosen by God. The coming of the Messiah therefore has come to mean the redemption of the Jewish people and an end to its suffering and tribulations." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How can I embrace suffering?

In a previous lesson, we discussed the principle of "sinking to new heights." I repeat a story for this lesson. On one occasion, a professor of religion went to the Western (wailing) Wall, microphone in hand, and began asking religious Jews why they were chosen. One responded, "We are chosen to suffer." Later, in making a point, about the suffering of the Savior, the professor said, "No one is chosen to suffer other than the Lord." Yet, the difficulties, calamities, and sufferings of the Jews will ultimately bring them closer to the Lord who covenanted to remember and save His people. Our sufferings bring us closer to Him and those that have the highest responsibilities of serving Him often suffer greatly. They "sink to new heights." "And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above

all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" (Doctrine and Covenants 122:7-8)

What can I do to overcome obstacles and temptations?

"Ecclesiastes or *Kohelet*, is one of the five *Megillot* (Five Scrolls: Song of Songs, Book of Ruth, Book of Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and the Book of Esther). It has won enduring popularity because of its wise maxims and its counsel on life. "Ecclesiastes" from the Greek and "*Kohelet*" in Hebrew, mean leader or teacher of a group. The Book reveals the wisdom acquired by *Kohelet* on his journey through life. He experiences joy and sorrow, faith and doubt, vanity and humility, hypocrisy and truth. The struggle to find meaning and purpose in life was as baffling for him as it is for us today. *Kohelet* arrives at the conclusion that the true joy of life lies not in wealth nor in vain pleasure but in the spiritual riches of fulfilling *mitzvot*, God's commandments. Love and reverence for the Almighty help man to accept his fate and to overcome the obstacles and temptation that continually beset him." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How does looking-up open my heart to God looking-down?

Once reconciled to God, the adversity in life can also bring us His peace. That gives a spirit of fulfillment, completeness, and serenity that enables us to comfort and bless others in their difficulties. The Apostle James' admonition to "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you," reminds me of the explanation Rabbi Stanley Wagner (1932-2013) of Denver University gave of the "Magen David, (*Urim* and *Thummim*; 'yes' and 'no' in old Hebrew)" It is shown as two interlocking

triangles, one pointing up and the other pointing down. Dr. Wagner said, "It reminds us of our relationship to God and His relationship to us." Letting God's spirit permeate our every action leads us to living true religion. It conveys a spiritual sweetness that enlivens our souls.