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# EPISTLE OF JAMES

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**Author & Audience:**

James the Just, brother of Yeshua, writing to mainly Jewish Believers in the immediate Diaspora: Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch

**Date:**

45-50 C.E.

**Purpose:**

This epistle has a very strong moral message, rooted within themes of the Wisdom literature of the Tanach and Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount. James is very concerned with his audience demonstrating the proper, external works of service and mercy, required of God's people if they claim to have faith.

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## 1

**Salutation**

<sup>1</sup> James<sup>a</sup>, a servant of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora: Greetings.

**Faith and Wisdom**

<sup>2</sup> Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you fall into various trials,

<sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

<sup>4</sup> And let endurance have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

<sup>5</sup> But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproaching, and it will be given to him.

<sup>6</sup> But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed.

<sup>7</sup> For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord,

<sup>8</sup> being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

**Poverty and Riches**

<sup>9</sup> But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position;

<sup>10</sup> and the rich in his humiliation, because like the flower of the grass he will pass away.

<sup>11</sup> For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance perishes; so also will the rich fade away in his pursuits.

**Trial and Temptation**

<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who endures trial; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

<sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself tempts no one.

<sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.

<sup>15</sup> Then the lust, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin; and the sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.

<sup>16</sup> Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters.

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<sup>a</sup> Grk. *Iakōbos*; "masculine proper noun; Greek form of the Hebrew name *Jacob*" ([BibleWorks 8.0: Friberg Lexicon](#)) or *Ya'akov*; Messianic versions tend to employ "Ya'akov" (CJB/HNV) or "Jacob" (TLV, The Messianic Writings).

<sup>17</sup> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

<sup>18</sup> Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

### **Hearing and Doing the Word**

<sup>19</sup> *This* you know, my beloved brothers and sisters. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

<sup>20</sup> for the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God.

<sup>21</sup> Therefore, putting away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.

<sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror;

<sup>24</sup> for he observes himself and goes away, and immediately forgets what he was like.

<sup>25</sup> But one who looks into the perfect Torah, the *Torah* of liberty, and abides by it, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who works, this one will be blessed in his doing.

<sup>26</sup> If anyone thinks himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue but deceiving his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

<sup>27</sup> Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep oneself unstained from the world.

## 2

### **Warning against Partiality**

<sup>1</sup> My brothers and sisters, do not hold the faith of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, *the Lord* of glory, with an *attitude of* personal favoritism.

<sup>2</sup> For if a man comes into your synagogue with a gold ring, in fine clothing, and a poor man comes also in dirty clothing,

<sup>3</sup> and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothing, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor one, "You stand over there, or sit down under my footstool,"

<sup>4</sup> have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

<sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters: did not God choose those who are poor in the world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

<sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor one. Is it not the rich who oppress you, and personally drag you before the courts?

<sup>7</sup> Do they not blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

<sup>8</sup> If, however, you fulfill the royal Torah<sup>a</sup>, according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF" [Leviticus 19:18], you do well.

<sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you are committing sin, being convicted by the Torah as transgressors.

<sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole Torah and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

<sup>11</sup> For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY" [Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18], also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER" [Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17]. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the Torah.

<sup>12</sup> So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by a Torah of liberty<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> For judgment *is* without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

### **Faith and Works**

<sup>14</sup> What does it profit, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith, but has no works? Can that faith save him?

<sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and in lack of daily food,

<sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," and yet you do not give the things needed for the body, what does it profit?

<sup>17</sup> Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead by itself.

<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith apart

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<sup>a</sup> Grk. *nomon teleite basilikon*; "the goal of Kingdom Torah" (CJB); "the royal law" (TLV).

<sup>b</sup> Grk. *dia nomous eleutherias*; correctly rendered as "by the law of liberty" (NASU, NRSV) or "by the law that gives freedom" (NIV); incorrectly rendered as "under the law of liberty" (RSV/ESV).

from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.”

<sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe, and shudder.

<sup>20</sup> But do you want to know, you foolish fellow, that faith apart from works is barren<sup>a</sup>?

<sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our ancestor justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?

<sup>22</sup> You see that faith was working with his works<sup>b</sup>, and by works faith was perfected;

<sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS” [Genesis 15:6], and he was called the friend of God.

<sup>24</sup> You see that a person is vindicated<sup>c</sup> by works and not by faith alone.

<sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

<sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.

### 3

#### *The Tongue*

<sup>1</sup> Let not many of you become teachers, my brothers and sisters, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment.

<sup>2</sup> For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man<sup>d</sup>, able to bridle the whole body also.

<sup>3</sup> Now if we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they may obey us, we guide their whole body as well.

<sup>4</sup> Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are guided by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot directs.

<sup>5</sup> So also the tongue is a small member, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!

<sup>6</sup> And the tongue is a fire. The world of unrighteousness among our members is the tongue, which defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is set on fire by Gehenna<sup>e</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human species.

<sup>8</sup> But no human being can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

<sup>9</sup> With it we bless the Lord and Father; and with it we curse people, who are made in the likeness of God;

<sup>10</sup> from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be so.

<sup>11</sup> Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?

<sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? Neither can salt water yield fresh.

#### *The Wisdom from Above*

<sup>13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good behavior his works in meekness of wisdom.

<sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast and so lie against the truth.

<sup>15</sup> This wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is Earthly, sensual, demonic.

<sup>16</sup> For where jealousy and selfish ambition are, there is confusion and every vile deed.

<sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

<sup>18</sup> And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

<sup>a</sup> Grk. *hē pistis chōris tōn ergōn argē estin*; “faith without works is dead” (KJV); “faith without works is useless” (NASU).

<sup>b</sup> Grk. *hē pistis sunērgēi tois ergois autou*; “faith was active along with his works” (RSV/NRSV/ESV); “his faith and his actions were working together” (NIV).

<sup>c</sup> Grk. verb *dikaioō*; more traditionally rendered as “justified”; the TLV has “proved righteous.”

There are different dimensions of “righteousness” or “justification” (Heb. noun *tzedaqah*; Grk. noun *dikaïosunē*) encountered throughout the Scriptures. 2:21 is a place where being declared innocent or forgiven of sins, the most frequent application of righteousness/justification, is not in view; 2:21 is a place where Abraham is depicted as being in covenant relationship with God as one of His own.

<sup>d</sup> Grk. *teleios anēr*; “mature man” (HCSB).

<sup>e</sup> Grk. noun *geenna*; “**Gehenna**, Grecized fr. [*gei hinnom*] (...Josh 15:8b; 18:16b; Neh 11:30) cp. Targum [*geihinnam*]...really [*gei ben-Hinnom*] (Josh 15:8a; 18:16a; 2 Ch 28:3; Jer 7:32; cp. 2 Kings 23:10, where the kethibh has the pl.: sons of Hinnom) *Valley of the Sons of Hinnom*, a ravine south of Jerusalem. There, acc. to later Jewish popular belief, God’s final judgment was to take place (cp. Just., A I, 19, 8). In the gospels it is the place of punishment in the next life, *hell*” (BDAG, 190-191).

## 4

### **Friendship with the World**

<sup>1</sup> Where do conflicts and where do fightings among you *come* from? *Are they* not from here: from your pleasures that wage war in your members?

<sup>2</sup> You lust and you do not have; so you murder. And you envy and cannot obtain; so you have conflict and war. You do not have, because you do not ask.

<sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

<sup>4</sup> You adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

<sup>5</sup> Or do you think that the Scripture speaks in vain: "He yearns jealously over the Spirit which He caused to dwell in us"?<sup>a</sup>

<sup>6</sup> But He gives more grace. Therefore *it* says, "GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE" [Proverbs 3:34, LXX].

<sup>7</sup> Submit therefore to God. But resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.

<sup>8</sup> Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

<sup>9</sup> Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom.

<sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

### **Judging a Brother or Sister**

<sup>11</sup> Do not speak evil against one against another, brothers and sisters. He who speaks evil against a brother or sister, or judges his brother or sister, speaks evil against the Torah, and judges the Torah; but if you judge the Torah, you are not a doer of the Torah, but a judge *of it*.

<sup>12</sup> *Only* one is the Giver of the Torah<sup>b</sup> and Judge, He who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you that you judge your neighbor?

<sup>a</sup> This statement is likely a synthesis of various Tanach passages, including, but probably not limited to: Exodus 34:14; Zechariah 8:2; Psalm 42:1-2; 84:2.

<sup>b</sup> Grk. *nomothētēs*; a Messianic version like the TLV has the more standard, "lawgiver"; the rendering here follows the CJB.

### **Warning against Boasting**

<sup>13</sup> Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into this or that city, and spend a year there and trade and make a profit";

<sup>14</sup> whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

<sup>15</sup> Instead *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

<sup>16</sup> But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

## 5

### **Warning to the Rich**

<sup>1</sup> Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.

<sup>2</sup> Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten.

<sup>3</sup> Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a testimony against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days.

<sup>4</sup> Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cries out *against you*; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth<sup>c</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> You have lived luxuriously on the Earth and in self-indulgence; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

<sup>6</sup> You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous *one*; he does not resist you.

### **Patience and Prayer**

<sup>7</sup> Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the land, being patient about it, until it receives the early and late rain.

<sup>c</sup> Grk. *Kuriou sabaōth*; Heb. equiv. *Adonai Tzavaot* (Delitzsch); Messianic versions vary on what to include, having a standard English "Lord of Hosts" (TLV); "Commander of all forces" (The Messianic Writings); or "ADONAI-Tzva'ot" (CJB).

The inclusion of the Tetragrammaton (YHWH/YHVH) in various modern Hebrew versions, is most perplexing, considering the fact that Second Temple Judaism would not readily pronounce the Divine Name of God.

<sup>8</sup> You also be patient; establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

<sup>9</sup> Do not grumble, brothers and sisters, against one another, that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the doors.

<sup>10</sup> As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

<sup>11</sup> Behold, we call those blessed who endured. You have heard of the patience of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful.

<sup>12</sup> But above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear, either by the Heaven or by Earth or by any other oath; but let your yes be yes and your no be no; so that you may not fall under judgment<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

<sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the assembly, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

<sup>15</sup> and the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effective petition of a righteous person can accomplish much.

<sup>17</sup> Elijah was a human being with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the Earth for three years and six months.

<sup>18</sup> And he prayed again, and the sky gave rain, and the ground brought forth its fruit.

<sup>19</sup> My brothers and sisters, if any among you wanders from the truth and one turns him back,

<sup>20</sup> let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

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<sup>a</sup> Grk. *hupo krisis*; "under condemnation" (RSV/NRSV/ESV).