



JAMES

APPLYING THE LAW OF THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL

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Introduction

Authorship of James

Tradition holds that the author of this epistle is James, the brother of our Lord. Paul refers to this James as one of the pillars of the Church (Gal 2:9). The epistle has been controversial, though, as it was not listed as one of the canonized New Testament writings in AD 140 or 170, yet it was included in the canon by AD 367. In 1522 Martin Luther referred to it as a “right strawy epistle.”¹ It includes Jewish scripture and motifs, suggesting a Jewish author.² As it is written in excellent Greek, it does not seem consistent with the education available to a poor family in the small Jewish town of Nazareth. Perhaps a knowledgeable scribe translated the letter into Greek, as happened with other letters.

Several later apocryphal writings were also given the name James (for example, *Protoevangelium of James* and *Apocryphon of James*). Later writers may have borrowed the name as a sign of

authority. Regardless of who the author was, we hold this epistle sacred. In the Restoration, we have a special affinity for this great book because of its important role in catalyzing Joseph Smith's First Vision (JS—H 1:11).

Audience

This is the only general Epistle in the New Testament written to “the twelve tribes . . . scattered abroad.”³ Many descendants of the twelve tribes were living across the Roman Empire at that time.⁴ The primary audience seems to be Israelite converts who struggled with adversity and patience while waiting for the Lord's return. The letter is written to disciples striving to live the Savior's higher law.

James included several references from the law of Moses and Writings and Prophets, suggesting that these Christians were familiar with much in our Old Testament scripture.⁵ However, one can understand the content without having a deep understanding of Old Testament scripture. This epistle was probably a circular letter to be read by Jewish Christians in churches across the Roman Empire.

Who's who among the Jameses?

The name James (*Jakobos* in Greek) comes from the Hebrew name Jacob. The most famous Jacob in the Old Testament was the grandson of Abraham whose name was changed to Israel.

Three Jameses are mentioned in the New Testament:

1. The Apostle James, the son of Zebedee and Salome, also known as a son of thunder. He was present with his brother, John, and Peter during many miracles, such as on the Mount of Transfiguration and at the raising of Jairus's daughter from the dead. He was killed by Herod in the early 40s (Act 12:2). He returned to earth as a resurrected being with Peter and John to give the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood to Joseph Smith (JS—H 1:72).
2. James son of Alphaeus and Mary, also a member of Jesus's original Twelve Apostles and sometimes known as James the Less.⁶
3. James the half-brother of Jesus (Mk 6:3; Mt 13:55). During Jesus's life, James did not believe that his half-brother was the Son of God (Jn 7:2–5). He was probably the James referred to in 1 Cor 15:7 as one who saw the resurrected Lord: “After that, he was seen of James then of all the apostles.” He became a pillar in the Apostolic Church, possibly a bishop, area authority, or an Apostle.⁷ He identified himself as a “servant of God” (Jms 1:1). According to the Jewish historian Josephus, James was stoned by the Sanhedrin in AD 62. Ananas “assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others . . . he delivered them to be stoned.”⁸

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Structure

The epistle opens with a modified introduction, not the formal Greek format and personal greeting of Paul’s epistles. It is a collection of exhortations, like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.⁹ The author argues twenty points. Each section stands on its own as self-contained counsel, connected only with catchwords. Much of James’s counsel cites or elaborates on Jesus’s teachings. The theme that runs throughout the epistle is applying Christ’s gospel. The epistle is known as “the most socially conscious writing in the New Testament.”¹⁰

James 1

The first chapter briefly touches on ten themes—patience, prayer, faith, wealth, temptation, good gifts, communication, sin, being doers of the word, and generosity—and then develops them.

Introduction—Jms 1:1

Jms 1:1. “James, a servant . . . to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.”

Jesus called all His disciples servants of God (Mt 23:8–12). Additionally, Abraham, Moses, David, and others called themselves servants of God. In Christianity, the twelve tribes include those adopted into Israel. As Jesus taught, all who apply His counsel become children of Israel (Mt 5:45; Jn 8:33–47). Therefore, this epistle is to all who are spiritually of Israel.

View trials and patience eternally—Jms 1:2–4

Jms 1:2–3 (NIV). “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”

The NIV’s “trials” in the KJV is “divers temptations” and in the JST is “many afflictions.” The JST is closer to the original Greek and doctrinally different from the KJV. Overcoming afflictions, especially trials of faith, is an important step in becoming mature disciples (compare JST, Heb 10:40). James teaches that disciples endure by focusing on God and learn patience by exercising faith in Christ. Nature’s law of the harvest testifies of these same truths.

God answers faith-filled prayers with wisdom—Jms 1:5–8

Jms 1:5–6. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, . . . ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.”

James outlines the importance of asking God in faith. Belief breeds faith, which grows with truth and reflection of the Lord’s evidence. Faith includes the desire to increase faith: “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mk 9:24). One of God’s greatest gifts is the ability to ask Him questions in faith and patience with the promise that He will answer them. James adds another qualification to our faith-filled prayers: they are to have “no trace of doubts” (JB) or “wavering” (KJV). He likens doubts to shifting winds and waves. Hearing God’s answers requires belief, patience, and fervent faith built on trust. There are other qualifications that James does not mention, including “if it is right,” remembering past promptings, and having an honest heart.¹¹

The impact of these verses is phenomenal as the catalyst of the Restoration. Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith led family devotionals every morning and night, reading from the Bible and praying with their children.¹² Lucy reported that her son Joseph began “seriously searching the scriptures” between the ages of twelve and fifteen.¹³ According to Oliver Cowdery (and later, William Smith’s memories), Joseph’s interest in this verse came from hearing a Methodist elder, George Lane, at a camp meeting.¹⁴

Jms 1:7–8 (NIV). “That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord . . . double-minded and unstable.”

We are double-minded when we vacillate between wanting to please the Lord and wanting to please our appetites or selfish desires. We are double-minded when we have not firmly committed to love the Lord more than anything else—that is, when our motives are not aligned with the Lord’s and we are either hypocritical or pursuing cross-purposes to the Lord.

Believers have cause to rejoice—Jms 1:9–11

Jms 1:9–10 (NIV). “***Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower.***” We see life differently when we look at it with an eternal view and prioritize God’s will. Humility is a blessing, while preoccupation with wealth is damning. For three verses James emphasizes the worthlessness of earthly riches. Like grass, their beauty lasts only a short time and then dies.

Resisting sin brings a crown—Jms 1:12–18

Jms 1:12 (JST). “***Blessed is the man that endureth resisteth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life.***” The JST correction makes a powerful difference. We should avoid temptations, not endure them! This section encourages the reader to persevere amid tribulations. The beginning sounds like a beatitude (for example, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”).¹⁵ Trials can prepare one for an eternal reward.

Jms 1:13–14 (BSB). “***When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ . . . But each one is tempted when by his own evil desires he is lured away and enticed.***” Satan is the tempter, not God. Yet, many Calvinistic translations of the Bible read, “God tempted . . .” because the translators’ theology gave God all power. However, Gen 22:1 literally reads, “God tested Abraham.” This doctrine is repeated in D&C 101:4: “They must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham.”

If we do not bridle the appetites and tendencies of the natural man and woman, Satan can use them to entice us to sin. In hunting wild game, animals are lured or “drawn away” (KJV) out of the safety of the thicket into an area set with snares. Similarly, Satan wants us to catch his bait. President M. Russell Ballard described temptation like fishing bait: “The use of artificial lures to fool and catch a fish is an example of the way Lucifer often tempts, deceives, and tries to ensnare us.”¹⁶

Jms 1:16–17 (NIV). “***Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above.***” James outlines the way to make daily choices and judge wisely—if it is good, it is of God (compare Moro 7:12–13). Disciples can distinguish which thoughts are inspired by the Spirit and which are not.¹⁷

Jms 1:18 (BSB). “***He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we would be a kind of firstfruits of His creation.***” We are born again through Jesus Christ as we accept Him as our spiritual Father and Master. The ancient firstfruit sacrifices required the first crop to be offered to God (Deu 26:1–11). Christians too must sacrifice their will for the delayed gratification of prioritizing the things of God. They become the firstfruits who present themselves to God as an offering to serve Him with their all.

Pure religion is listening, loving, repenting, and doing—Jms 1:19–27

Jms 1:19–21 (NIV). “***Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, . . . get rid of all moral filth and the evil . . . and humbly accept the word planted in***

you, which can save you.” Disciples’ commitment to join the Lord and sacrifice for Him leads to accepting the higher laws of the gospel. The most important person we listen to is God: we implant His words—received from the Spirit, scripture, or elsewhere—then listen to others. James emphasizes the need for exercising self-control to talk less and put away anger and bad habits (or “all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness”).

Jms 1:22. “be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” Discipleship requires more than a verbal confession. We assume responsibility as servants of God. We must sacrifice whatever is needed to fulfill God’s will in our lives. James explains this by describing the fleeting reflection in a mirror. James asks converts for lasting commitment and action.

Jms 1:25 (BSB). “one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom, and continues to do so—not being a forgetful hearer, but an effective doer—he will be blessed in what he does.” The law of liberty emphasizes Christ’s higher law, including repentance and cleansing from sin. James teaches that keeping Jesus’s commandments is what truly brings our freedom.

Jms 1:26. “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.” Christians become hypocrites if we verbally attack others, lie, or speak unkindly. Additionally, the Spirit departs when we do these things, so our religious claims become worthless.

Jms 1:27 (JST). “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 vices of the world.” Children and widows received Jesus’s attention during His ministry too. Pure religion includes not only serving others with love but also avoiding worldliness. Worldly vices are Satan’s lure of money, power, and selfishness. These temptations also take us from our ministry to others.

James 2

Avoid partiality toward the rich—Jms 2:1–9

Jms 2:1 (NIV). “My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.” Showing favoritism to the rich was especially inappropriate given that Jesus, our exemplar, went out of His way to meet the needs of the underrecognized classes. The word *sunagóge*, “synagogue” or “assembly” (KJV), adds to the evidence that the audience came from a Jewish background. Currying favor with important people in any assembly is a problem. Many “dress for success” or for fashion and receive better opportunities based on their wealth and appearance. The JST ties favoritism to a lack of faith: “**Ye cannot** have the faith . . . **and yet have** respect **of to** persons.” Favoritism—whether based on economic status, race, education, mental health, disabilities, size, or anything else—is a form of prejudice, and disciples of Christ must remove all prejudices.¹⁸ Christ calls disciples to act in love to all. Giving deference based on wealth is Satan’s plan, not the law of consecration. Unity can only thrive if we treat others with respect and love.

Jms 2:2 (NIV). “*Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring.*” Possibly the rich and well-dressed were getting better treatment than the poor. The mention of a gold ring probably refers to a Roman nobleman or senatorial rank.¹⁹ The next phrase adds that the man dressed in “good apparel” (KJV), possibly denoting the white wool toga of Roman citizenship. It may even suggest that he sought support for a political office. In any case, he was representing the aristocracy, not the poor.²⁰

The Christians’ eagerness to please the aristocracy may have come from their need for political protection and freedom to practice their religion. Judaism was one of the ten foreign religions legal at the time, and initially Christianity piggybacked along since its adherents were Israelites. Yet within a few decades Christianity became illegal.

Jms 2:6. “*ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?*” This is a common New Testament theme also mentioned by Jesus and Paul.²¹ Problems may have arisen with factions of social rank in the Church. Judeo-Roman society was fractured by class distinctions. An empire-wide census from AD 47 shows that a third of the population worked servants or were enslaved.²² Class distinctions are the antithesis of a Zion society and the law of consecration.

Jms 2:7. “*Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?*” This question may address the social protocol that claimed Jesus was a common criminal. In the context of this chapter, Christians who show favoritism blaspheme His name, too. Those who have taken on Christ’s name at baptism and deliberately sin are, in a sense, flouting the name of God. In the Old Testament, God’s chosen people are referred to as those “on whom the Lord’s name is called” (Deu 28:10; Amo 9:12). Another interpretation of the text is that the preferred rich who left the Church slanderously reviled God.²³

Jms 2:8 (BSB). “*If you really fulfill the royal law stated in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.*” Finally, James comes to the underlying principle behind all this unfair treatment. The “royal law” was also cited by Jesus and is found in the center of the Torah—the most important place in its chiastic structure (Mt 22:39; Lev 19:18). Leviticus was the priesthood manual, but the message applied to all Israelites. All other Jewish rites and precepts were subsidiary to this royal law.

This unique couplet, the royal law, may emphasize God as the true King, not the Roman emperor. James referred to political figures earlier, thus putting God’s royal law in opposition to the Roman propaganda. President Marion G. Romney referred to this couplet and confirmed that “caring for the poor and the handicapped and those who need our help is a main purpose and an absolute requirement in fulfilling the royal law of loving our neighbors as ourselves.”²⁴ Jesus asked us to go beyond the Levitical law of love with His new commandment to “love one another; as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34).

Jms 2:9 (NIV). “*if you show favoritism, you sin.*” James begins and ends with the same point. Christian fellowship should be motivated by God’s law of love, not by wealth, prestige, or beauty.

Keep the law of the gospel—Jms 2:10–13

Jms 2:10 (JST). “For whosoever shall, **save in one point, keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.**” This last phrase means “accountable for them all,” or “liable to a penalty.”²⁵ It does not mean that one who steals is guilty of murder; rather the one who steals is guilty of breaking the law. Joseph Smith also emphasized the need to keep all God’s laws: “Any person who is exalted to the highest mansion, has to abide a celestial law, and the whole law too.”²⁶ This is why repentance is vital.²⁷

While progressing line upon line, we often stumble. But through daily repentance, we may return to God and receive forgiveness and the Spirit’s companionship. Jesus encouraged disciples in the Sermon on the Mount to control their hearts and desires. He warned disciples that even if they were to think about killing or breaking the law of chastity, they would have broken the law (Mt 5:28).

Jms 2:12 (BSB). “**Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.**” The “law of liberty” (KJV) is Jesus’s higher law of the gospel, which is based on His mercy and love. If we commit to becoming Christians, we covenant to show mercy. When we forgive others—even those who have hurt or abused us—we learn how the law of forgiveness and freedom works. By allowing God to take over judgment of those who have wronged us, we become free of the hurt and anger that stunt progression and inhibit the Spirit. We share Christ’s gift of forgiveness when we show mercy to others.

Jms 2:13 (BSB). “**For judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.**” Judgment under the higher law will be both sterner and milder than under the law of Moses. Jesus and James both teach that those who show no mercy will be given no mercy (Mt 25:34–41).

Faith requires works—Jms 2:14–26

Jms 2:14 (CSV). “**What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can such faith save him?**” This begins the Greco-Roman diatribe of questions and answers. In the New Testament, faith is always tied to Jesus Christ, not just wishful thinking or a positive attitude. Belief in Christ requires following Him. If we do not live our faith, we do not really have faith. It sounds like some early Christians only accepted a superficial confession of faith without works, as some do now. Jesus warned against the same thing (Mt 7:21).

Jms 2:15–16 (JST). “**For if a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, . . . Depart in peace, . . . notwithstanding ye he give them not . . . what doth it profit is your faith unto such?**” James’s example shows how worthless belief is without action. In the Old and New Testaments, “depart in peace,” or “go in peace,” was a farewell.²⁸ It is hypocritical to voice peace without helping the needy.

Jms 2:17 (JST). “**faith, if it hath have not works, is dead.**” James emphasizes this message four times. True worship is not just words and ceremonies but active deeds of love (see also verses 20, 24, 26).

Jms 2:19 (JST). “*Thou believest ~~that~~ there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble; thou hast made thyself like unto them, not being justified.*” Converts made up the entire adult Church at this time, so the responsibilities for membership needed to be made completely clear. James gives a sharp rebuke to those who feel verbal allegiance is sufficient. Satan and his devils also believe, and we are on the same level as they are if we do not take our knowledge and actively apply it. The Holy Spirit abides in us only if we live the gospel; thus, our faith will die if we do not turn it into action.

Jms 2:21 (NIV). “*Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?*” At that time, Jews honored Abraham as the progenitor of the covenant and believed that their genealogical line through him ensured them a place in heaven. Because of this, Abraham’s name is mentioned over seventy times in the New Testament. James uses Abraham’s works as an example of Christian conduct. Abraham needed both faith and works to carry out the Lord’s command. Abraham followed God’s direction, even with the most difficult request imaginable. God often asks disciples to sacrifice things that are most tender to show our commitment to Him. This level of sacrifice is required to develop the faith needed to become more Christlike.

Jms 2:22 (BSB). “*You see that his faith was working with his actions, and his faith was perfected by what he did.*” Abraham perfected his faith with action. Likewise, we complete our beliefs with deeds.

Jms 2:23. “*Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness.*” James cites Gen 15:6. Abraham’s righteousness made him a friend of God (2 Chr 20:7; Isa 41:18). Similarly, Jesus told His Apostles that they would be His friends if they did what He commanded them (Jn 15:14).

Jms 2:24 (NIV). “*a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.*” James does not contradict Paul. Paul rejects the works of the law of Moses only as the means to salvation. Paul also taught we need to live the law of the gospel, or as James referred to it, the law of liberty.²⁹

Jms 2:25 (JST). “*Likewise also ~~was not~~ Rahab the harlot ~~was~~ justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and ~~had~~ sent them out another way?.*” James’s second example of combining works and faith is a woman—the “harlot Rahab” from Jos 2:1–6. Paul also highlights Rahab as a woman of great faith (Heb 11:31). The Old Testament book of Joshua describes Israelite spies checking out Jericho. Rahab had a home on the city wall and hid the Israelite spies on her roof until they could secretly escape unharmed. Due to her kindness, when the Israelites returned to destroy Jericho, Rahab and her household were spared and joined the Israelites. She became the great-grandmother of King David according to Joseph’s genealogy in Mt 1:5. Throughout Jewish history, Rahab was held as a shining example of hospitality and conversion.³⁰ For more on Rahab as “harlot,” see my commentary on Heb 11:31.³¹

Jms 2:26. “*as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.*” For the fourth and most forceful time, James repeats his thesis. Faith is an action and must motivate positive deeds or it is “useless” (NAS, NIV, JB). This time James adds the image of the death of our mortal bodies.

James 3

Controlling the tongue—Jms 3:1–12

Jms 3:1. “*be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*” Other English translations changed “master” to “teacher,” which gives this whole section a different bent. A broader definition of the Greek *didaskalos* explains it as “an instructor acknowledged for their mastery in their field of learning; in Scripture, a Bible teacher, competent in theology.”³² James warns those who teach the word of God that they will have a greater condemnation if they speak falsely.

Jms 3:2 (BSB). “*We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to control his whole body.*” By practicing verbal self-control, we are better able to take charge of our lives. James humbly includes himself as one who has offended others in word. Disciples who are good examples of what to say and when to say it have developed self-control.

God often designed scripture to communicate more than one meaning and often to testify of His Son. It is interesting to see Jesus in this verse. Jesus is the perfect teacher, and He never spoke amiss. By His word, He created the world.

Jms 3:4–5 (BSB). “*ships . . . are so large and . . . steered by a very small rudder . . . the tongue is a small part of the body, but it boasts of great things. Consider how small a spark sets a great forest ablaze.*” Paul illustrates his point with three images: a bridle, a ship’s helm, and a forest fire. A boat often symbolized the Church in early Christianity. Hence, a rudder can be the leader or teacher. In the more literal understanding, the tongue’s size compared to the rest of the body does not measure its influence. We can control the rest of our actions if our mouth is governed. The fierce winds are often symbolic of temptations (for example, Eph 4:14 uses the imagery of wind to symbolize extra distractions or useless interests). The repercussions of verbal abuse and persecution spread like a fire. In verse 5, “the course of nature” is literally “the wheel of being,” referring to our existence.

Jms 3:7–8 (NIV). “*All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue.*” Adam received dominion or stewardship over the animals in Gen 1:28; 2:19. Even humans who train bulls and lions can still struggle to tame their own tongues. Controlling our words can be one of the weaknesses that we need Christ’s help to overcome: “I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me” (Eth 12:27). Christians, though, strive to speak only kindly and honestly.

Jms 3:10. “*Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.*” Our words can praise God but should not curse God’s creations, our fellow beings. It is wrong to degrade each other.

Jms 3:11–12 (NIV). “*Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives.*” If the audience were Israelites from the Jordan Valley, they would have been familiar with mineral and freshwater springs, figs, olives, and berries. Sweet water refers to the well of living water. Water was sweet or drinkable if it was running, while

bitter water was stagnant. The children of Israel experienced the bitter waters of Marah on their Exodus (Ex 15:23). In contrast, Ezk 47:1 describes pure waters flowing from the temple as a symbol of revelation, God's gifts, and life (also Ps 46:4; Isa 55:1). Symbolically, sweet water is clear inspiration from God. If James compares preaching to water, as Jesus did, this links back to the teachers in Jms 3:1 (Jn 7:37).

True wisdom involves humble living—Jms 3:13–18

Jms 3:13 (NIV). “*Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.*” Maintaining a meek, humble perspective fosters learning. James refers to the wise as those without pride, bragging, or self-centeredness. The KJV “conversation” is also translated “life” (NIV), “behavior” (NASB), and “conduct” (NKJV).

Jms 3:14–15 (NIV). “*if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, . . . Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.*” The antithesis of humility and wisdom are pride and selfishness, which foster “unrighteous dominion” (D&C 121:39). The motives behind selfishness and ambition, or “this wisdom,” are satanic. In Greek thought, wisdom was one of the noblest values. The word *philosophy* comes from two roots: *philo*, “love,” and *sophy*, “wisdom.” Greek schools of philosophy such as the Stoics and Cynics taught the art of argument, or dialectics. James attacks this by differentiating between wisdom from God and the counterfeit version from Satan.

Jms 3:17. “*But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*” Wisdom from above comes through revelation. If something brings peace to our mind and heart, it is from the Spirit of God (D&C 6:15, 23; 8:2). Additionally, God's wisdom brings mercy, fairness, sincerity, and good fruits. Isa 32:17 describes, “The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness.”

James 4

Worldliness is an enemy of God—Jms 4:1–6

Jms 4:1–2 (NIV). “*What causes fights and quarrels among you? . . . You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.*” The Saints may have had a problem with contention, or their hearts were set on the wrong things. Quarreling or fighting for lust, material advantage, gratification, passions, or pleasures is wrong. James probably refers to hostilities that kill the Spirit in our war against Satan, not a military war.

Jms 4:3 (NIV). “*When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*” Usually the Lord will not give us what we want if we ask for the wrong things, with the wrong attitude, or at the wrong time. James

addressed asking amiss earlier in Jms 1:6: “Ask in faith, nothing wavering.” If we are motivated by the wrong source or if we are not asking for what is wisest in the Lord’s sight, we will not receive what we ask for. However, God still hears all our prayers, and gives instruction (D&C 6:14). His delay in answering is to teach us a wiser purpose and to help us prepare for His answer.³³ God will answer our prayers as we align our will with His, not the other way around. This is why we must humbly trust and keep seeking (see Alm 29:4).

James mentions two reasons why our prayers are not answered, but there are many more.³⁴ Prayers may not be answered until one repents or learns to draw closer to God, or perhaps God already gave an answer or needs to test our faith. Sometimes our prayers are answered but we fail to hear the answer.³⁵ We may feel like Joseph Smith did when he charged God with hiding from him (D&C 121:1–2). But God’s ways are wiser, and we have much to learn from the process of waiting for answers. During those times when we desperately want God’s witness, we can follow the Apostle Thomas’s example: Thomas did not leave his fellow Apostles and continued to hope. While waiting, he did not deny his past witnesses. He remained in the right place so that at the right time, he heard the Lord’s answer.³⁶

Jms 4:4 (NIV). “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God?” In this context, “adulterers” (KJV) refers also to idolators. This stems from the Old Testament description of the chosen people’s relationship to God as a marriage covenant (see Hos 3:1). Zion is God’s bride. In this relationship, when the people leave God’s covenant, they figuratively commit adultery. James may be referring to those who selfishly love their own desires more than keeping God’s Sabbath day holy. Jesus also addresses this in Mt 6:24. According to James, if we love worldliness, we are an enemy to God. Our hearts must be purified to want God’s will more than the things of the world.

Jms 4:6. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” James quotes Pro 3:34. Disciples should not be arrogant in relationship to God and His creations. Eternal blessings come to the humble.

Submit your will to God’s—Jms 4:5–12

Jms 4:7–8. “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts.” This is the formula for conquering and abandoning evil. God can transform our lives. James uses the imagery of walking toward the Lord and, like a magnetic pull, being embraced in His love. Jesus taught the same principle in His Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:24; compare Jer 31:3).

Jms 4:10. “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.” James asks disciples to have a repentant heart before God by avoiding extravagant ways, not for disciples to have a stoic nature or a forced depression.

Judge not—Jms 4:11–12

Jms 4:11–12 (NIV). “**Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. . . . There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, . . . who are you to judge your neighbor?**” James elaborates on the need to control our tongues, introduced in Jms 3:1–12. When one speaks against others, one judges them, breaking God’s law. The law of the gospel calls for forgiveness. Disciples are not critics. Jesus is the one Lawgiver and Judge.³⁷ From our mortal perspective, we need to trust the One who can see the whole eternal picture. Are we trying to take over God’s role when we judge others?

Do good in God and boast not—Jms 4:13–17

Jms 4:13–15 (NIV). “**you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, . . . and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. . . . Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do.’**”

James again attacks materialism and reminds his audience that they should never leave God out of their plans.³⁸ The goal of mortality is not to get gain. Disciples put their lives in God’s control. We need to be malleable to God’s directions. James is anti-self-assurance. The scriptures are filled with examples of God blessing His people with the goods of the world, but James condemns the commercial schemer who carries out his or her elaborate plans to get rich without consulting God’s will. The Lord asks His disciples to bless the world. Yet the sinful self-centeredness of planning and executing without paying attention to God’s will filled James’s society and ours.

Jms 4:16 (NIV). “**you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.**” Boasting is prideful and comes from a self-centered heart. However, James is not referring to building a child up with encouragement or honoring another (compare Alm 26:10–11).

Jms 4:17 (NIV). “**If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.**” We will be held accountable for knowing what God has revealed. All those that come to earth are given the Light of Christ to distinguish right from wrong. And those of the age of accountability will be held accountable for their actions. Serving and loving more comes at the price of learning more. Or as the Lord later taught, “unto whom much is given much is required” (D&C 82:3).

James 5

Warning to rich oppressors—Jms 5:1–6

Jms 5:1–3a (BSB). “**you who are rich, weep. . . . Your riches have rotted. . . . Their corrosion will testify against you and consume your flesh like fire.**” James writes like an oracle of doom. Seeking money to get gain is Satan’s first law of false faith.³⁹ Often those whose hearts are set on materialism lose the self-satisfaction that came when they first made money. Natural disasters and divinely guided

destructions can change the perspective of the materialistic. This is written in the present perfect tense as if the misfortunes had already occurred. This tense is usually used by the prophetic voice.

Jms 5:3b–4 (NIV). “*You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you.*” God will punish those managers who cheat their laborers. Like the blood of Abel that cried from the ground for justice, the poor laborers cry out against their overlords who become rich off the laborers’ work (Gen 4:10). The KJV includes the title Lord of the Sabaoth, which is a military title like the “Lord of Hosts” (ESV) or the “Lord Almighty” (NIV), the one who will deliver judgment (which is not the same title as the Lord of the Sabbath).

Jms 5:5–6 (BSB). “*You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous, who did not resist you.*” James likens selfish people who are insensitive to the needs of those around them to a fatted calf ready to be slaughtered. They glut themselves for no personal avail, as their lives will end shortly. A fat heart represents feeding selfish desires.

Patience through suffering—Jms 5:7–12

Jms 5:7–8 (NIV). “*Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land. . . . You too, be patient and stand firm.*” The early Christians expected Jesus to return to reign in glory within their generation or their grandchildren’s generation. This agricultural reference of patiently waiting also speaks of trusting God. His implanted word will bear fruit. After two millennia, Christians continue to trust in the Second Coming. The Lord has revealed that the righteous can cut that time short if a Zion people becomes ready to enter His presence.⁴⁰

Jms 5:9 (NIV). “*Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!*” For the fifth time, James returns to the theme of judgment.⁴¹ He warns his audience not to complain or create contention. Contention was also the first problem that Jesus denounced when visiting the Nephites (3 Ne 11:29).

Jms 5:10–11 (NIV). “*Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets . . . Job’s perseverance. . . . The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*” The ancient prophet Job was the premier example of patience. The Lord also used Job as the example of suffering to the Prophet Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail (D&C 121:10).

Jms 5:12 (NIV). “*Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’*” James turns to many of Jesus’s teachings here (compare Mt 5:33–37). The phrase “above all” or “but before all things” (BLB) is a connecting phrase and does not mean that this is the most important commandment in his epistle. Furthermore, swearing is mentioned only once in the context of making an oath, while ten other topics in the epistle are repeated multiple times.⁴² Making oaths with God should not be taken lightly. James is asking those who have said yes to their covenants to keep them and patiently endure their sufferings.

Elders heal the sick through laying on of hands—Jms 5:13–18

Jms 5:13. “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.”

James opens the subject of healing by encouraging more prayer. He encourages music to praise the Lord and rejoice. In the Greco-Roman world some music was used for rejoicing, but it was “arrogant and salacious songs that were characteristics of banquets and similar celebrations.” Satan has counterfeited the divine purpose of some music and uses it as his tool also.⁴³

Jms 5:14. “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” What role did elders play in the early Church? In the New Testament, elders are not just older citizens but also leaders (1 Pet 5:2). By AD 40–50, the elders had a permanent place in the Jerusalem congregation along with the Apostles.⁴⁴ Barnabas and Paul were ordained elders (Act 14:23). They are mentioned as Church leaders, as preachers and teachers, and as Apostles.⁴⁵ *Elder* was a title of honor and distinction.⁴⁶ Also, elders appear to have been lay members since they were engaged in ordinary occupations as well.⁴⁷ The anointing of the sick with oil is one of the ordinances from the primitive Church that the Lord restored in our dispensation.

Anointing with oil typifies Christ. The names Christ and Messiah mean “anointed.” God the Father anointed Jesus to become the Holy One. It is significant that the oil used for anointing is olive oil, symbolizing Christ’s Atonement. As mentioned earlier, the name Gethsemane alludes to an olive press where oil was crushed and squeezed out (Mt 26:36–46). Jews saw olive oil as a symbol for life and spirit. The *Apocalypse of Moses* 9 and the *Book of Adam and Eve* describe the tree of life as flowing with healing olive oil.⁴⁸ Also, as instructed in the law of Moses, the anointing of the sons of Aaron to become priests and the coronation of kings both used olive oil.⁴⁹ Olive oil was also used for wounds and in preparing bodies for burial.⁵⁰ Jews and Apostles anointed the sick with oil.⁵¹ There was nothing magical about the oil, yet if used according to God’s laws, the anointing symbolizes Christ, the Anointed One.

Jms 5:15. “the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” James emphasizes the dual need for Lord’s role and the prayer of faith in healing (also 1 Cor 12:28). Many ancient peoples, including those in the Old and New Testaments, thought that sickness was a consequence of sin (1 Kng 15:4; Mt 9:2). As discussed earlier, this is a mistaken notion.⁵² The praying Saint or elder calls on God’s power for both healing and forgiveness. James links divine healing and forgiveness. In one example of healing, Jesus showed that when He forgave sins, the man was healed as well (Mk 2:5–11). Yet not everyone that Jesus healed appeared to have had a repentant heart. Forgiveness requires repentance. Both healing and spiritual cleansing use the Spirit and power of God.

James’s discussion raises a few questions: Can one be healed by the power of God without receiving a spiritual cleansing? Does the Spirit also heal? Does the Spirit’s presence always cleanse to some degree? Moroni summarized the doctrine behind these questions by saying: “They . . . were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost.”⁵³ Because the Spirit is the cleansing agent, when the Spirit is

present for healing, a spiritual cleansing may occur too.⁵⁴ This does not mean that everyone who feels the Spirit will be healed, but perhaps everyone who is healed is cleansed to some degree.

Confession and (re)conversion—Jms 5:16–20

Jms 5:16 (NIV). “*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*” Confession is an important part of the repentance process. It enables accountability, change, and reconciliation. Acknowledging our mistakes and apologizing to those we have wronged is the beginning of deep, meaningful change and forgiveness. Serious sins should be confessed to a bishop.⁵⁵ Confession to a priesthood leader may seem like a daunting and embarrassing first step, and yet it is often the easiest part of true repentance.

Jms 5:17 (NIV). “*Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not.*” Elias is Greek for Elijah. This venerable Old Testament prophet was a righteous example of offering prayers and sacrifice to draw on God’s power. First Kings 17 and 18 tell the story of Elijah asking God to close the heavens from rain for three and a half years in an attempt to humble the children of Israel. The climax is the day the rain returned. All the wicked priests of Baal met on Mount Carmel to sacrifice to their god with great drama, in hopes of bringing rain. Elijah then offered a sacrifice to Jehovah with great fire from heaven. The death of the priests of Baal stopped the drought, and the downpour of rain came as Elijah ran down the mountain (Jesus also recounted this story in Lk 4:25).

Jms 5:19–20 (NIV). “*My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth . . . Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*” James closes his epistle with a promise of forgiveness to those who preach the gospel. If we can help restore an uncommitted believer or returning believer, we and they are blessed. The entire Epistle of James is filled with guidelines on how to become more Christlike. James’s closing promise is that as we come toward perfection, we receive God’s forgiveness.

On a related note, bringing someone back to the fold includes the need to bear testimony so that the Spirit can witness of the truth. In this dispensation, God promised to forgive our sins when we testify: “The testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon; and they rejoice over you, and your sins are forgiven you” (D&C 62:3). The two are related since bearing our testimonies can be the means of restoring us to a straighter path.

Notes

1 Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 725.

2 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 6. These motifs can be seen in Jms 1:1; 2:2; and so forth.

3 “General Epistle” is also written “Catholic Epistle,” which means “general or universal.”

4 In the New Testament, disciples from at least four tribes of Israel appear: Elizabeth and Zacharias from Aaron (Lk 1:5); Anna from Asher (Lk 2:36); Joseph husband of Mary from Judah (Mt 1:3, 16); Paul from Benjamin (Rom 11:11); and Barnabas from Levi (Act 10:36).

5 The Old Testament was an open canon at the time of the Apostolic Church. It was referred to as the Law, Writings, and Prophets.

6 See, for example, Mk 15:40; see also Mt 10:3; 27:56; Lk 6:15; 24:10.

7 Gal 1:19. The word *apostle* may have referred to a missionary or anyone else sent as well. It appears that more people are referred to as Apostles than there were members of the Twelve. The word *apostolos* means “a messenger, one sent on a mission, an apostle, envoy, delegate, one commissioned by another to represent him in some way, especially a man sent out by Jesus Christ Himself to preach the Gospel.” “*Apostolos*,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/652.htm>.

8 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.200.

9 Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1985), 447. The structure is also similar to the apocryphal literature known as *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.

10 Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 725.

11 D&C 6:22; 8:1; 9:7; Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Learning the Language of the Lord: A User’s Guide to Personal Revelation* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2018), 163–193.

12 Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Lucy’s Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2001), 38. The practice of daily devotionals was recorded by both Lucy and her son William. Daily prayer, “both morning and evening,” was also something Lucy Mack did in her childhood under the tutelage of her mother, Lydia Gates Mack. The most exhaustive biographer of Lucy Mack Smith described her as “a model of domestic spirituality, a model drawn directly from her New England culture about proper behavior for pious women” (page 17). In their home, it was also the practice that “whilst we worked with our hands we endeavored to remember the service of & the welfare of our souls” (page 323). According to firsthand accounts, Joseph Smith continued this same practice of evening family devotionals in his home. Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mae Andrus, comps., *They Knew the Prophet* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1974), 147. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2002), 10: “[My] goodly parents spared no pains to instructing me in the Christian religion.”

13 Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 54. William, the only son to live to an old age, remembered that his mother “made use of every means which her parental love could suggest, to get us engaged in seeking for our soul’s salvation” (page 39).

14 “History, 1834–1836,” p. 59, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1834-1836/63>; Larry C. Porter, “Reverend George Lane—Good ‘Gifts,’ Much ‘Grace,’ and Marked ‘Usefulness,’” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1969): 321–340; Jeremy Talmage, “‘Effusions of an Enthusiastic Brain’: Joseph Smith’s First Vision and the Limits of Experiential Religion,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2020): 25–48;

“Sermons of a Palmyra Preacher,” Church History, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/content/museum/museum-treasures-jesse-townsend-sermons>. George Lane preached at a camp meeting near the Smiths’ home in Palmyra. Years later, Joseph’s younger brother William recalled that Joseph heard him preach on Jms 1:5. Unfortunately, William was not always reliable, and this is our only source for this detail. Joseph Smith was also familiar with the Bible on his own right.

15 Mt 5:10. Compare 1 Cor 9:25; 2 Tim 2:5; Rom 8:28; and 1 Pet 5:4.

16 M. Russell Ballard, “O That Cunning Plan of the Evil One,” October 2010 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

17 Face to Face with Elder and Sister Bednar (worldwide youth broadcast, May 12, 2015), facetoface.churchofjesuschrist.org.

18 See 2 Ne 26:33; Alm 32:5; 3 Ne 6:12.

19 Johnson, *Letter of James*, 221.

20 Petri Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2012), 48. A splinter group of Jewish Christians was known by the Hebrew and Aramaic name Ebionites, meaning “poor.” The group’s records reveal they had a letter of James the Just, but we do not know whether it was like the New Testament epistle.

21 Mt 6:2–3; 19:21; Mk 12:43–44; Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 11:22; 13:3.

22 S. Scott Bartchy, “Servant,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:420. Timothy G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 183.

23 Johnson, *Letter of James*, 226.

24 Marion G. Romney, “The Royal Law of Love,” April 1978 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

25 Johnson, *Letter of James*, 232.

26 “History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” p. 1866, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/238>.

27 Russell M. Nelson’s call to repent daily has the potential to keep our allegiance aligned with righteousness: “Nothing is more liberating, more ennobling, or more crucial to our individual progression than is a regular, daily focus on repentance. “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” April 2019 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

28 In the Old Testament: Jdg 6:23; 18:6; 19:20; 1 Sam 20:22; 29:7; 2 Sam 15:27; 2 Kng 5:19. In the New Testament: Mk 5:34; Lk 7:50; 8:48; 24:36; Jn 20:19; Act 16:36; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1; Eph 6:23; Php 4:9; 1 Ths 5:23; Tit 1:4; 3 Jn 1:15.

29 See 1 Cor 3:13; 2 Cor 5:10; Mt 25:31–46.

30 Johnson, *Letter of James*, 245, lists at least twelve examples of ancient texts highlighting Rahab in a positive manner.

31 Scholars debate the translation of “harlot.” Could it have meant she was an innkeeper? Or was she forced into that profession by the men in her life, but she had an honorable heart? Whatever profession she had initially, Rahab became a heroine, exhibiting change, faith, works, hospitality, honesty, and abiding conversion. As good works need pure desires, Rahab’s actions were counted for righteousness. God sees her, not her title.

32 “*Didaskalos*,” HELPS Word Studies, online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/1320.htm>.

33 D&C 6:14; 9:7; 122:7.

34 Wilson, *Learning the Language of the Lord*, 163–193. I use a whole chapter to elaborate on the problem of not hearing answers.

35 Mosi 4:11, 20; Alm 39:16; D&C 4:5; 6:22; 90:24; 122:7.

36 Patrick Q. Mason, *Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of Doubt* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2015), 131–132.

37 The Lord has delegated short-term judgment to His bishops as judges in Israel. D&C 58:14–17; 107:69–72.

38 See, for example, Jms 1:10; 2:1–7; 5:1–6.

39 Hugh Nibley, “Leaders and Managers” (Brigham Young University commencement address, August 19, 1983), speeches.byu.edu. As I stated in my commentary from Lk 12:15, “Contention over financial issues has plagued most generations. Hugh Nibley helped define the problem: ‘We have been warned against things of this world . . . but exactly what are the things of the *world*? An easy and infallible test has been given us in the well-known maxim “*You can have anything in this world for money.*” If a thing is of this *world*, *you can have it for money*; if you cannot *have it for money*, it does not belong to this *world*.”

40 D&C 84:97; 109:59; see also Rev 19:7.

41 Jms 1:16–17; 2:12–13; 3:1; 4:11.

42 The ten themes are patience, prayer, faith, wealth, temptation, good gifts, communication, sin, being doers of the word, and generosity.

43 Johnson, *Letter of James*, 57.

44 Act 11:30; 15:2; 16:4; 22:18.

45 Act 14:14; 20:4, 28; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:17–19; 1 Pet 5:1.

46 1 Pet 5:1; 2 Jn 1; 3 Jn 1.

47 Johnson, *Letter of James*, 59.

48 Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick, eds., *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), preface. “A blessing of olive oil: the Oil from the tree of life was the elixir of immortality according to many ancient texts. e.g. Life of Adam and Eve 36; II Enoch viii.3–5; Apocalypse of Moses ix.3; Acts of Pilate 3 (19); Acts of Thomas 157.” See also Bo Reicke, *James, Peter, and Jude* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 59.

49 1 Sam 10:1, Ex 28:41; 30:30.

50 Isa 1:6; Lk 10:34; Mt 26:6; Mk 16:1; Mishnah, *Shabbath*, 23:5.

51 Mk 6:13; Jerusalem Talmud, *Berakot* 1, 3a, 9. This later reference in the Talmud claims the practice originated earlier.

52 See my commentary on Jn 9:1; Avraham Steinberg, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 34: “Any illness may result from sin.” Jewish society incorrectly presumed that physical imperfections made one a sinner because priests with birth defects were not allowed to serve at the altar of the temple: “No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire” (Lev 21:21).

53 Moro 6:4; see 3 Ne 12:2; Moro 8:26; D&C 76:52.

54 On July 9, 1843, in a Sunday sermon in Nauvoo, the Prophet Joseph taught: “Peter, on the days of Pentecost might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man if not done in view of the getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism and is good for nothing without the other half—the Holy Ghost.” “Discourse, 9 July 1843, as Reported by Willard Richards,” p. 304, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-9-july-1843-as-reported-by-willard-richards/5>; spelling and punctuation silently modernized.

55 Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1969), 179, 186.