



“Faith is the Substance of Things Hoped For”

Hebrews and James

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Hebrews

We don't know from the text who wrote Hebrews or under what circumstances it was composed, or when. It doesn't have the usual address (to and from) that we find in other New Testament letters. Tradition assigns it to Paul, written from Rome during his first imprisonment. This is taken from the authorship 'hints' at the end (Hebrews 13:22-25), which allude to Paul without mentioning his name. Many note the stylistic differences between this letter and the others that include Paul's name. One ancient church leader, Clement of Alexandria, accounted for these differences by recounting that Hebrews was written in "their own language" (presumably Aramaic) and then translated by Luke into Greek. Therefore it is Luke's writing style in the Greek that we read today.¹ Another early copy of the New Testament places Hebrews immediately after Romans, implying Pauline authorship.² Generally LDS commentators accept Pauline authorship of the epistle or at least Pauline influence (meaning perhaps one of Paul's associates wrote down what Paul said). One main reason is that Joseph Smith accepted Paul as the author.³ But that cannot be considered definitive due to the nature of his statements.⁴

Hebrews' main point is that Jesus the Messiah is the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law. Said Joseph McConkie, "None of the books in the New Testament, the Gospels included, are more Christ centered than Paul's epistle to the Hebrews."⁵ Many Old Testament scriptures are quoted, and many Levitical practices are explained in terms of Christological symbolism. Indeed, Hebrews quotes the Old Testament at least thirty-nine times, more than any New Testament book except Romans (fifty-eight times) and Matthew (fifty-seven times). However, like Revelation, it also alludes significantly to Old Testament imagery, language, events, and symbols. To list and discuss them all would require more than an entire paper.⁶ The list below includes just the direct quotations:

1:5	2 Samuel 7:14 (1 Chronicles 17:13)	8:5	Exodus 25:40
1:5	Psalms 2:7	8:8-12	Jeremiah 31:31-34
1:6	Deuteronomy 32:43	9:20	Exodus 24:8
1:6	Psalms 97:7	10:5-7	Psalms 40:6-8
1:7	Psalms 104:4	10:16-17	Jeremiah 31:33-34
1:8-9	Psalms 45:6-7	10:30	Deuteronomy 32:35-36
1:10-12	Psalms 102:25-27	10:30	Psalms 135:14
1:13	Psalms 110:1	10:37-38	Habakkuk 2:3-4
2:6-8	Psalms 8:4-6	11:18	Genesis 21:12
2:12	Psalms 22:22	11:21	Genesis 47:31
2:13	Isaiah 8:17-18	12:5-6	Proverbs 3:11-12
3:7-11, 15, 18	Psalms 95:7-11	12:12	Isaiah 35:3
4:3	Psalms 95:11	12:20	Exodus 19:12-13
4:4	Genesis 2:2	12:26	Haggai 2:6
4:7	Psalms 95:7-8	12:29	Deuteronomy 4:24
5:5	Psalms 2:7	13:5	Deuteronomy 31:6, 8
5:6	Psalms 110:4	13:5	Joshua 1:5
6:13-14	Genesis 22:16-17	13:6	Psalms 118:6
6:20	Psalms 110:4	13:11-12	Leviticus 16:27
7:17, 21	Psalms 110:4		

¹ See Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 192.

² Wayment, *The New Testament*, Hebrews, Author.

³ *Teachings*, 59; D&C 128:15; for more details, see Ogden, 244-245 and Anderson, *Understanding*, 197-201.

⁴ He was not prophetically declaring authorship but simply attributing the book to Paul, as was common in his day.

⁵ Joseph F. McConkie, "Jesus Christ, Symbolism, and Salvation (Hebrews)," in Millet, *Studies in Scripture: Acts to Revelations*, 192.

⁶ One commentary devotes seventy-five pages to it, with a count of thirty-seven quotations, forty allusions, nine OT summarizations, and thirteen name or topic references. See Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 919-995.

Outline

1. Jesus is Superior (1:1 – 3:6)
 - a. God now speaks by his Son (1:1-4)
 - b. The superiority of the Son (1:5-14)
 - c. Confirmed with signs, wonders, and miracles (2:1-4)
 - d. A merciful and faithful high priest (2:5-18)
 - e. Greater than Moses (3:1-6)
2. Entering into the Rest of God (3:7 – 4:13)
 - a. Warning (3:7-19)
 - b. God's rest (4:1-13)
3. Jesus as High Priest (4:14 – 7:28)
 - a. Jesus the great high priest (4:14 – 5:10)
 - b. You need milk (5:11-14)
 - c. Maturity in faith (6:1-12)
 - d. The promise to Abraham (6:13-20)
 - e. The Melchizedek priesthood (7:1-28)
4. Levitical Sacrifices and Christ's Sacrifice (8:1 – 10:18)
 - a. A better covenant established upon better promises (8:1-13)
 - b. The two sanctuaries (9:1-22)
 - c. Christ put away sin (9:23-28)
 - d. Sacrifices and offerings (10:1-18)
5. Faith and Endurance (10:19 – 12:29)
 - a. A life in Christ (10:19-39)
 - b. Examples of faith (11:1-40)
 - c. Jesus, the architect of our faith (12:1-13)
 - d. Warnings (12:14-29)
6. Service, Obedience, and Greetings (13:1-19)
7. Concluding Remarks (13:20-25)

Jesus is Superior – Hebrews 1:1 – 3:6

God now speaks by his Son – Hebrews 1:1-4

1:1 ***spoken unto us by his Son***. God has spoken through prophets in the past (v. 1), but now has spoken by his Son, Jesus, the heir and creator of all things.

1:3 ***the express image of his person***. Or, “the character of his essence” (TW); “the exact representation of his being” (NIV).

1:4 ***a more excellent name than they***. Jesus received a “more excellent name” from the Father than did the angels. Philippians 2:9-10 alludes to this, teaching that the name “Jesus” is “above every name” because all will bow to him one day.

The superiority of the Son – Hebrews 1:5-14

Though he came to earth as a mortal and suffered for our sakes, Jesus is greater than the angels—the divine messengers—that God sent with the gospel throughout the ages. Verses 5-13 each include an Old Testament quotation (see list in the introduction above). The quotes are often from the Septuagint (LXX) version, showing that the author was writing to Greek-speaking Hebrews, or perhaps that the Greek translator used the LXX text when doing the translation from Aramaic to Greek. The point of all these verses is that Jesus enjoys a position higher than the angels (v. 4), one at the right hand of the Father as his first begotten Son, who was with the Father from the beginning, created the worlds, and will be there at the end.

1:6 This is a quote from the Septuagint (Greek, LXX) version of Deuteronomy 32:43, which has this phrase near the beginning of the verse but which is absent in the KJV (and the Hebrew texts on which the KJV is based, called the Masoretic Text, MT). Interestingly, in the Dead Sea Scrolls version, this phrase is also included, but instead of "angels" it has the term "sons of God," matching a parallel phrase in Psalm 97:7. Texts below with relevant parts in italics.

KJV Hebrews 1:6 And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, *And let all the angels of God worship him.*

KJV Deuteronomy 32:43 Rejoice, O ye nations, *with his people*: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, *and to his people.*

LXX Deuteronomy 32:43 Rejoice, ye heavens, with him, *and let all the angels of God worship him*; rejoice ye Gentiles, with his people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in him; for he will avenge the blood of his sons, and he will render vengeance, and recompense justice to his enemies, and will reward them that hate him; and the Lord shall purge the land of his people.

DSS (4QDeut^a) Deuteronomy 32:43 Rejoice, O nations, with his people; *and bow down to him all you sons of God*, for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his enemies, and will recompense those who hate him, and will atone for the land of his people.

1:6b-7 **JST** "... And let all the angels of God worship him. ~~And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers as a flame of fire.~~ **And of the angels he saith, Angels are ministering spirits.**

The KJV makes a point that God alone makes his angels like the wind ("spirit" is *pneuma* which also means wind) and his personal ministers like fire. The JST version keeps the ministers like fire but turns the statement about angels being spirits (which JS knew wasn't always true) into a doctrinal statement of their role, tying the language to verse 14.

1:14 **ministering spirits**. This concept is picked up on D&C 76:88, where those of the telestial order are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation.

The superiority of the Son – Hebrews 2:1-4

2:1 **lest at any time we should let them slip**. "so that we do not drift away" (NIV). The imagery is that of a boat that is not securely tied to the dock or properly anchored drifting away in the current.

2:3 **How shall we escape**. If people were punished in times past for disobeying the message brought to the earth by angels (v. 1), how shall those who have heard the message of God from the Lord himself escape judgment?

2:3 **first began to be spoken by the Lord**. Jesus himself taught the message about his mission and atonement first, then it was reiterated by "them that heard," meaning his disciples and apostles.

2:4 **with signs and wonders**. God's witness of the words of Jesus included miracles and other signs of his power and authority, including "gifts" of the Spirit, which would include speaking in tongues, prophecy, and many more.

A merciful and faithful high priest – Hebrews 2:5-18

2:9 **made a little lower than the angels**. Referring to Jesus' mortality; he left his high place in the heavenly realms to come to and become a mortal, suffer, and die. Compare 1 Nephi 11:16, 26, which speak of his condescension.

2:10 **the captain of their salvation**. Other translations have "leader" (NAB and NLT), "pioneer" (RSV), and "author" (NIV). The sense is that Jesus is the founder or originator of salvation, one who takes the lead and shows the way.

2:10 **perfect through sufferings**. Why did Jesus have to suffer? Hebrews 2:17-18 and 4:15 answer that question wonderfully, but a great answer is found in Alma 7:11-13:

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me."

Pay close attention to the word "that" in these verses, because those phrases explain why Jesus did the various things. My favorite is how Jesus takes on himself our infirmities that he might know how to succor [help/support/rescue] us. "We could not be expected to pattern our lives after someone whose nature was so very different from our own that following in his footsteps would be impossible."⁷

2:14 **that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death.** Through Jesus' sacrifice, he has overcome the devil who (in Hebrew thinking) has power over the dead in Sheol/Hades/hell.

2:15 **all their lifetime subject to bondage.** Because of sin, all men are in bondage to Satan and to death.

2:16 **took not on him the nature of angels.** He condescended not just to the level of angels, but to the level of "the seed of Abraham," mortal man.

2:16 **JST** "... For verily he took not on *him* the **likeness** ~~nature~~ of angels ..."

Though becoming an angel was even a condescension for him, Jesus didn't even appear in any kind of angelic glory, but simply came as a man.

2:17 **made like unto his brethren.** Part of why Jesus had to become mortal and suffer (see 2:10 above), so he could be fully merciful and faithful and "make reconciliation" for sins. Here also we're introduced to the concept of Jesus as high priest, a theme which will occupy a major portion of Hebrews.

2:18 **hath suffered being tempted.** Jesus was not above temptation. He is the only mortal to have fully resisted it, to be sure, but he was tempted as surely as us. Knowing how that feels, he can then succor all of us who give in.

Greater than Moses – Hebrews 3:1-6

Jesus is compared to Moses who was faithful "in all his house" ("whose house are we," v. 6). The metaphor is extended to building: Jesus built the 'house' in which Moses was faithful, and the builder is greater than the occupant.

3:1 **Apostle.** Jesus was the 'sent one' (the meaning of "apostle") of the Father.

3:1 **High Priest.** Jesus was not of the tribe of Levi so that he held the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood (see chapter 7). But like the high priest, he performed salvific ordinances on our behalf—though in his case, only once, whereas the high priest had to do it at least once each year.

3:1 **our profession.** Not 'our job' but 'the act of professing/proclaiming.' In other words, we have a testimony of Jesus.

3:2 **appointed him.** The Greek verb here, *poieō*, means 'to make' or 'to do.' A better translation, though one hard for most Christians to accept because of the Nicene Creed, is 'Who was faithful to him who made him.' The Father 'made' Jesus just as he 'made' all of us.

⁷ McConkie, "Jesus Christ," in Millet, *Acts to Revelation*, 194-195.

3:3 **more honour than the house**. The Jews appropriately honored the temple but the author's point is that the building of the house has more honor than the house itself. Even so, we should honor the one who built all things: God (v. 4).

3:6 **whose house are we**. The punch line of the metaphor is here. Men build houses (v. 4) but God built the world (which provides materials for houses). As Moses was faithful to the house of Israel, so Christ is faithful to his 'house,' which represents us.

Entering into the Rest of God – Hebrews 3:7 – 4:13

Warning – Hebrews 3:7-19

Having mentioned Moses and his house, the author used the ancient Israelites to illustrate the behavior needed to rectify fallen man with God. Verses 7-11 are a long quote of Psalm 95:7-11, explaining how the children of Israel were not allowed to enter into the rest of the Lord because they hardened their hearts. This passage was recited at the beginning of synagogue services at the beginning of the Sabbath, so it was very familiar to Jewish readers.⁸ This is followed in verses 3:12 – 4:1 by a "targum" or interpretation of the just-quoted passage from Psalm 95, applying it to us: we must hold "our confidence steadfast" in Christ and "fear" (a call to action) lest we "come short" of enjoying the rest of God.

3:13 **while it is called To day**. Tying back to the language in verse 7, the author reminded his listeners that they should not procrastinate any needed changes in their lives but do them 'today.'

3:14 **if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end**. Or, "if we hold tightly to our original confidence in him to the end" (TW).

3:17 **them that had sinned**. Numbers 14:29-37 recounts this story, which also includes v. 18.

3:18 **enter into his rest**. What is the 'rest of the Lord'? See D&C 84:24 (or more broadly, 84:6-26), where it says it is "the fulness of his glory." "To return to the presence of the Lord is, in the language of the scriptures, to obtain the 'rest of the Lord'."⁹

God's rest – Hebrews 4:1-13

The call to action: live so as to be prepared for the presence of God.

4:2 **JST** "For unto us was the **rest** ~~gospel~~ preached . . ."

The theme of this chapter is entering into the rest of the Lord. This small change brings that out and keeps the flow.

4:3 **JST** "For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if **they harden their hearts they shall not enter into my rest; also, I have sworn, If they will not harden their hearts,** they shall enter into my rest: although the works **of God** were **prepared, (or finished,)** from the foundation of the world."

4:5 **JST** "And in this *place* again, If they **harden not their hearts** they shall enter into my rest."

Both here and in verse 3, the JST emphasizes the nature of our effort required to enter into God's rest—humility, accepting God's will, consecration of our thoughts and loyalties.

4:8 **if Jesus had given them rest**. Not Jesus of the New Testament but Joshua of the Old, who led the children of Israel into the Promised Land. Joshua (Hebrew) and Jesus (from the Greek) are the same name. The point is that Joshua led them into the land, which was entering into the Lord's rest, but only symbolically. They still had a long way to go to enter into the true rest of the Lord (return to his presence; v. 9).

⁸ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 4:24.

⁹ McConkie, "Jesus Christ," in Millet, *Acts to Revelation*, 200.

4:10 ***ceased from his own works, as God did from his***. The author compares entering into the rest of God to the institution of the Sabbath day, mentioned back in verse 4. We enter into God's rest through the power of Christ, ceasing our own works.

4:12 ***sharper than any two-edged sword***. The language of this comes from Psalm 149:6 and Proverbs 5:4, though the use of the term differs there. In usage, Hebrews 4:12 and Revelation 1:16 both speak of God's words being a two-edged sword, but Hebrews draws out the metaphor with the language of dividing (cutting) and piercing, but also discerning (or judging) the thoughts of various people.

4:12 ***JST*** "piercing even to the dividing asunder of **body soul** and spirit"

Compare D&C 88:15, which was received shortly after the Prophet had worked on this part of the translation: "And the spirit and the body are the soul of man." This is another example of a doctrine being learned first through the JST work, then in direct revelation recorded in the D&C.

Jesus as High Priest – Hebrews 4:14 – 7:28

These three and a half chapters teach us how Jesus held the higher priesthood and thus superseded the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood held by the priests and Levites of the Old Testament and the days of the early church.

Jesus as the great high priest – Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10

This first section is a transitional phrase to tie back to what was already said and what is about to be declared.

4:14 ***hold fast our profession***. This has nothing to do with employment but everything to do with testimony: "our profession" is that which we profess, our witness and testimony.

4:15 ***in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin***. That Jesus was tempted just as all of us but never sinned is what makes him superior to all earthly priests. He did not avoid sin because he was divine; he became divine because he completely avoided sin.

4:16 ***come boldly unto the throne of grace***. Not because we have done anything to merit such boldness but because, as the previous two verses explained, we have a high priest who advocates for us, who fully understands us, and who invites us into the presence of the Father "that we may obtain mercy, and find grace."

5:1 ***ordained for men***. Or, "For every high priest who is taken from among the people [set apart, made holy] is appointed to represent them to God" (TW). Verses 1-3 discuss the role of the high priest, which is to offer "gifts and sacrifices for sin" in behalf of the people, and to have compassion on those needing help (recognizing his own infirmities).

Here is a list of seven duties of the high priest and how Christ is the great high priest in Hebrews:¹⁰

High Priest (OT)	Christ as High Priest (Hebrews)
1. Enter into the most holy place (Leviticus 16:3)	1. Rent the veil and entered God's presence (1:3; 4:14; 9:12, 24)
2. Mediate with God for the people (Exodus 28:29)	2. Labors as our mediator (8:6; 9:24)
3. Bear the sins of the people (Exodus 28:38)	3. Bore the sins of the repentant (9:14-15; 10:22-24)
4. Offer incense as a symbol of prayer (Leviticus 16:12-13)	4. Speaks to the Father in our behalf (7:25; 8:1-2)
5. Make atonement for himself and others (Leviticus 16:32)	5. Offered himself as an atonement for our sins (7:27; 8:26-27; 9:28; 13:12)
6. Judge uncleanness and worthiness (Leviticus 13:2)	6. Is the judge of us all (4:12; 8:12; 10:13, 30-31)
7. Bless the people (Numbers 6:23)	7. All blessings come through him (2:8-10; 5:9)

¹⁰ McConkie, "Jesus Christ," in Millet, *Acts to Revelations*, 198-199.

5:4 ***no man taketh this honour unto himself***. We appropriately use this scripture to teach the manner of receiving the priesthood, but the author used it not in that general way but for a specific argument. The “honour” is to be high priest, which is a calling from God. Note that in NT times, the office of high priest was a highly political position, appointed by the Roman leaders and subservient to them, so many of these men then had indeed taken that honor unto themselves. The author taught that this was not correct. Just as today no one appoints themselves bishop, so in that day no one should have appointed themselves high priest. The position should only be filled by someone “called of God, as was Aaron” (compare Leviticus 8:1-9).

5:5 ***Christ glorified not himself***. Jesus didn’t appoint himself our Savior but was given that task by the Father (see Moses 4:2; Abraham 3:27-28).

5:6 ***a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec***. Quoting Psalm 110:4, the argument is that the priesthood used to officiate in the temple is superseded by another priesthood, represented by the ancient king and priest, Melchizedek, whose name means ‘my king is righteousness’ (Genesis 14:18).

5:7-8 The JST states in a marginal note that “The 7th and 8th verses of this chapter are a parentheses alluding to Melchizedek and not to Christ.”

5:9 ***the author of eternal salvation***. The word “author” is *aitios*, meaning ‘the cause of anything.’ Without Jesus, there is no salvation.

You need milk – Hebrews 5:11-14

5:11 ***ye are dull of hearing***. The audience of the letter is chided for unbelief in these concepts of Christ, probably tying back to the ongoing argument among Jewish Christians about the role of the Law of Moses in the church.

5:12 ***have need of milk, and not of strong meat***. Because of their disbelief and rejection of Christ’s doctrine, the author declares that they are put back to infant stage, needing a diet of milk only and not real food (also v. 13).

5:14 ***their senses exercised to discern both good and evil***. Or, “their abilities of perception trained to discern both good and evil” (TW).

Maturity in faith – Hebrews 6:1-12

6:1 ***JST*** “Therefore **not** leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ”

Most translations see this as leaving the basics and moving to more ‘meaty’ doctrines. This is in line with the JST change which advocates *not* leaving the essential doctrines of the atonement which take us to perfection.

6:3-10 ***JST*** “³ And **we will go on unto perfection** ~~this will we do~~, if God permit. ⁴ For **he hath made it** ~~is~~ impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, ⁵ And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, ⁶ If they shall fall away, to **be renewed** them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify **unto** themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame. ⁷ For **the day cometh that** the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them **who dwelleth thereon**, by whom it is dressed, **who now** receiveth blessings from God, **shall be cleansed with fire**. ⁸ For ~~But~~ that which beareth thorns and briers *is* rejected, and *is* nigh unto cursing; **therefore they who bring not forth good fruits, shall be cast into the fire; for their** ~~whose~~ end *is* to be burned. ⁹ But, beloved, we are persuaded **of** better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. ¹⁰ For God *is* not unrighteous, **therefore he will not** ~~to~~ forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

The key phrases here bring the text into an eschatological context: “cleansed with fire” and “cast into the fire.” We go on to perfection, but if we fall away after having such a perfect knowledge, we crucify Christ again and the atonement cannot work in our life, so we are left for judgment.

6:6 **If they shall fall away.** Compare verses 4-6 to Alma 24:30, where those who fall away into sin “become more hardened,” making their lives worse than those who never learned of Christ and the Atonement. See also D&C 76:35.

The promise to Abraham – Hebrews 6:13-20

6:13 **he could swear by no greater.** Men ‘swear’ (make oaths or covenants) in the name of something greater than themselves, such as swearing by heaven or the temple or doing covenants in the name of Christ (see also verse 16). But God’s word is based on his own perfection and we can trust in it (also verses 18-19; Genesis 22:16-18).

6:18 **it was impossible for God to lie.** This is a remarkable declaration, for most Gods in the NT world were capricious and untrustworthy. To say that it was impossible for God to lie was to declare something very unique about the Hebrew God. It is the basis for all of our hope in him, all of our trust that his promises will be fulfilled, all faith that we can ask in righteousness and it will be granted.

6:19 **hope we have as an anchor of the soul.** The hope for better things to come, for forgiveness, for resurrection, for eternal family relationships, and so much more, all are represented by an anchor that we have firmly planted to hold us steady (see 2:1).

6:20 **after the order of Melchisedec.** The author quoted Psalm 110:4 again and will quote it at least two more times while speaking of the higher priesthood (7:17, 21). In chapter 7, he will explain why this order of Melchisedec is important.

The Melchizedek priesthood – Hebrews 7:1-28

Using the argument that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Genesis 14), the author showed how that priesthood, held by a non-Israelite, was higher than the Levitical, held by the descendants of Abraham, allowing Jesus to enter within the veil.

7:2 **King of righteousness.** The meaning of Melchizedek (*malki-sedeq* in Hebrew), though technically it is ‘my king is righteousness’ (as indicated by the possessive “i” on the end of *malki*).

7:2 **King of peace** "Salem" (*shalom*) means 'peace.'

7:3 **Without father, without mother, without descent.** Melchizedek has no known parents or descendants from the OT, giving his story the air of mystery—he appears, receives tithes of Abraham, blesses him, and disappears from the story.

7:3 **JST "For this Melchizedek was ordained a priest after the order of the Son of God, which order was without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; And all those who are ordained unto this priesthood are made like unto the Son of God; abiding abideth a priest continually."**

The JST takes the phrase applied to the mysterious Melchizedek and applies to the priesthood instead. We learn much about Melchizedek from latter-day revelation. See Alma 13; D&C 84:6-26; 107:1-4; and JST Genesis 14:25-40. He was also a focus of the Dead Sea Scrolls community at Qumran and other apocryphal works, with additional information recorded, including that he was translated, like Enoch (see 2 Enoch and 11QMel).

Given this information, it provides a slightly different perspective of Abraham's opening lines (Abraham 1:2). Abraham is a "follower of righteousness," an allusion to both Melchizedek and Christ. He desires to be a "prince of peace," another allusion to being like Melchizedek. Given those desires and efforts, he finally received the priesthood under Melchizedek's hand.

7:7 **the less is blessed of the better.** The logical conclusion of the story—Abraham gave tithes to and received a blessing from Melchizedek, not the other way around (v. 5-6), so Abraham was “the less” of the two.

7:9 **Levi also, who received tithes, payed tithes in Abraham.** Levi, as one group of Abraham's descendants, received tithes of others of Abraham's descendants. But Abraham paid them to Melchizedek, so Melchizedek must be greater than Levi, who was "in the loins of his father" (v. 10) in Abraham's day.

7:11 **what further need was there that another priest should rise.** The crux of the argument is that if perfection comes by the Law of Moses and the priesthood of Aaron, why would there be a prophecy about another priesthood, another order and examples of that higher order at work in the scriptures?

7:12 **the priesthood being changed.** Meaning, the reinstitution of the Melchizedek priesthood among the church, the argument being that if there is a higher priesthood, there is also a higher law.

7:13 **another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar.** The tribe of Levi was the only one authorized to hold the Aaronic priesthood and administer sacrifices at the altar of the temple. Melchizedek came from "another tribe," who had authority outside of the Levitical order.

7:14 **our Lord sprang out of Juda.** Judah was not a tribe that could hold the lesser priesthood, yet Jesus was from that tribe and wielded great priesthood power. The logic forces us to conclude that his priesthood—that of Melchizedek—was greater than the Levitical. (See Isaiah 11:1; Micah 5:2; Matthew 1:1; Romans 1:3.)

7:18 **a disannulling of the commandment.** "For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness" (NASB).

7:19-22 **JST** ¹⁹ For the law **was administered without an oath and** made nothing perfect, but **was only** the bringing in of a better hope ~~did~~; by the which we draw nigh unto God. ²⁰ **And Forasmuch inasmuch as this high priest was** not without an oath, **by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament** ~~he was made priest:~~ ²¹ (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) ²² ~~By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament."~~

God never said the Levitical priesthood or the Law of Moses would endure forever, but he made just such an oath concerning the Melchizedek priesthood. Jesus himself is the assurance of this oath, the "guarantee of a better covenant" (v. 22, NIV, NASB).

7:24 **because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.** Unlike priests who filled the role in abundance because of death over hundreds of years (v. 23), Jesus came just once and continues in his role as eternal high priest forever, never changing.

7:25 **he is able to save them to the uttermost.** It is not a temporary forgiveness of sins but an eternal one.

7:26 **such an high priest became us.** "Such a high priest meets our need" (NIV). Back to the point of 5:1-3.

7:26-27 **JST** ²⁵ For such an high priest became us, *who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made ruler over higher than the heavens;* ²⁶ **And not who needeth not daily,** as those high priests, **who offered to offer up sacrifice daily,** first for his own sins, and then for the **sins of the people;** ~~people's;~~ **for he needeth not offer sacrifice for his own sins, for he knew no sins; but for the sins of the people.** And this he did once, when he offered up himself."

This change emphasizes the perfection of Christ and that he didn't need to make atonement for himself but only for us, alluded to in several places in Hebrews, such as 4:15.

Levitical Sacrifices and Christ's Sacrifice – Hebrews 8:1 – 10:18

These three chapters continue the comparison of Christ's sacrifice to those made under the Mosaic Law.

A better covenant established upon better promises – Hebrews 8:1-13

The author transitioned now to another thought: since Jesus is the great high priest after the order of Melchizedek, he is worthy to administer in the heavenly tabernacle in our behalf.

8:2 **A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle.** Jesus is the minister of the heavenly temple (v. 1), the residence of God, built by God himself, and not man like the temples on earth.

8:3 **this man have somewhat also to offer.** Since the earthly role of every high priest was to offer sacrifices, it is also required of Jesus to have something to offer in the celestial temple.

8:4 **on earth, he should not be a priest.** God had already set up a system of priesthood and temple ordinances, so if Jesus' role was to do the same on earth, he would be out of a job, so to speak.

8:4 **JST "Therefore while For if he was were on the earth, he offered for a sacrifice his own life for the sins of the people. Now every should not be a priest under the law, must needs seeing that there are priests that offer gifts, or sacrifices, according to the law."**

The KJV version makes the point that Jesus was not a priest when on earth (being of the tribe of Judah) but the JST shifts the focus to his atoning sacrifice, contrasting that to the sacrifices offered by the priests in the temple.

8:5 **the example and shadow of heavenly things.** The priests on earth are a type of what takes place in the eternal temple in heaven.

8:6 **he is the mediator of a better covenant.** As the high priest in the heavenly temple, Jesus mediates in our behalf with a new and better covenant, that supersedes the Mosaic ordinances and practices, which were not perfect (v. 7).

8:8-12 This is the longest Old Testament quotation in the New Testament, from Jeremiah 31:31-34. It makes the point that there is a new covenant that supersedes the old, thus completing the argument started in this chapter but especially in verses 5-7.

The two sanctuaries – Hebrews 9:1-22

9:1-7 A description of the tabernacle in the wilderness. Verse 6 is the daily sacrifice with the lighting of the menorah and the incense, and the eating of the shewbread. Verse 7 is the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), the one day a year where the high priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled blood on the mercy seat to atone for his sins and those of all Israel. This was all a symbol looking toward Christ.

9:8-14 The high priest annually entered into the holy of holies and offered sacrifice. This was "a figure" (v. 9) for Christ and had to be repeated each year because "that could not make him that did the service perfect" (v. 9). In contrast, Jesus, as the great high priest (v. 11), entered once and gave his own blood for our "eternal redemption" (v. 12-14).

9:15-20 In each case in this passage, the JST changes "testament" to "covenant," which is correct according to the Greek. The JST also changes various phrases to "victim" (e.g., v. 16). "Covenant" in the Old Testament means 'cutting in half,' alluding to the practice of animal sacrifice in conjunction with covenant making. Jesus thus became the ultimate victim, securing the new covenant between man and God.

The Greek word translated "testament" (*diathēkē*) also has the sense of a "last will" which is only in effect when the owner of the will dies. In other words, the practice of wills and covenants are related, both requiring the death of someone or something to take effect.¹¹

¹¹ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 4:59.

Christ put away sin – Hebrews 9:23-28

9:24 **now to appear in the presence of God for us.** Having completed his personal sacrifice for all mankind, Jesus stands in God's presence, ready and willing to advocate for fallen man.

9:25 **Nor yet that he should offer himself often.** Jesus' sacrifice was a one-time event, not an annual or repeated activity, such as done in the temple.

9:26 **now once in the end of the world hath he appeared.** Reflecting the eschatological image of the day that Jesus' coming was at the end of the age, bringing in the eternal kingdom of God to the earth. We're still waiting for that event even now and though we know that we are in the last days, it's impossible to know how long it will be until the Second Coming (v. 28).

Sacrifices and offerings – Hebrews 10:1-18

10:1-4 How annual (or daily) sacrifices are only a reminder of the true sacrifice ("a shadow") and do not of themselves offer any purifying effect. The rest of this section continues to make this point in slightly different ways.

10:14 **by one offering he hath perfect for ever them that are sanctified.** Those who make covenants and give themselves fully to the Lord can be made "perfect" (complete, whole) through the Atonement of Christ.

Faith and endurance – Hebrews 10:19 – 12:29

This section emphasizes the importance of faith over works by using many examples of people who exerted faith and were blessed accordingly.

A life in Christ – Hebrews 10:19-39

10:19-24 Completes the application of the Mosaic practices to Christ and to us.

10:19 **boldness to enter into the holiest.** Because of "the blood of Christ," we can with boldness and confidence present ourselves before God, ready to enter into his presence.

10:22 **draw near with a true heart.** In the sincerity of our thoughts and emotions, we can come near to God, our hearts "sprinkled" clean as the priest sprinkled blood under the altar and our bodies "washed" with Living Water.

10:25 **Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.** Even though Christ has prepared the way, we still have reason to meet together often, to exhort each other to prepare for the return of Christ the king.

10:26 **if we sin willfully after.** After receiving divine revelation that brings truth, if we sin of our own choice, then we are making the Atonement as of none effect in our lives, as if there had not been a sacrifice for our sins. With no further repentance, we face "a certain fearful looking for of judgment" (v. 27).

10:29 **how much sorer punishment.** Under the Mosaic Law, a person could be stoned for sinful behavior witnessed by two or three (v. 28). How much worse will be the punishment, then, if we disrespect and dishonor the sacrifice of Christ in our behalf?

10:34 **ye had compassion of me in my bonds.** Another hint about the author that some use to point to Paul, but many early Christians were in bonds.

10:36 **ye have need of patience.** Faith and patience are linked together. One cannot have faith and not expect sometimes (usually) a delay between the faith and the blessing.

10:39 **we are not of them who draw back unto perdition.** Or, "We are not those who shrink back and are destroyed" (TW).

Examples of faith – Hebrews 11:1-40

This chapter provides a list of people and activities that exhibit the power of faith, including: the creation of the world (11:3); Abel (11:4); Enoch (11:5); Noah (11:7); Abraham (11:8-10); Sara (11:11-12); Isaac (11:17-19); Jacob (11:20-21); Joseph (11:22); Moses (11:23-29); Jericho (11:30); Rahab (11:31); Gideon (11:32); Barak (11:32); Samson (11:32); Jephthae (Jephthah in Judges 11; 11:32); David (11:32); Samuel (11:32); and the prophets (11:32).

11:1 **JST** “Now faith is the ~~substance~~ **assurance** of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

This is an excellent translation change, and subsequent modern translations followed the exact same language (NASB, RSV, NLT).

11:33-39 A summary from the OT and some apocryphal sources of the trials and experiences of faithful saints and prophets.

11:35 **JST** “Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a ~~better~~ **the first** resurrection:”

The first resurrection is the “better” one because it is the one the righteous will enjoy.

11:40 **JST** “God having provided some better ~~thing~~ **things** for us, ~~that they~~ **them through their sufferings, for** without ~~us should~~ **sufferings they could** not be made perfect.”

This change continues the theme of the book, that suffering provides growth, but it is interesting to note that in D&C 128:18, Joseph Smith quoted the scripture as it is in the KJV, applying it to the principle of baptism for the dead.

Jesus, the architect of our faith – Hebrews 12:1-13

12:1-2 Jesus had no regard for himself as he gave his life for us. So we need to set aside all our sins and follow him.

12:2 **Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.** Or, ‘the pioneer and perfecter.’

12:7-8 Quoting Proverbs 3:11-12 in verses 5-6, the author interpreted it here that it is because of God's love that we suffer. If he didn't love us as children, he wouldn't give us experiences that, in the end, help us grow.

12:9 **be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?** As we subjected ourselves to our earthly fathers for correction, we should submit to the Father of our spirits, in order to have eternal life.

12:11-12 When we are experiencing the 'teaching moments,' it can be a very hard thing, but with the perspective of time, we can see the hand of God in those days. In the meantime, we are to strengthen others who are having such experiences, lifting up their hands weakened with trials and discouragement, and strengthening their step when they have little energy left.

Warnings – Hebrews 12:14-29

12:14 **holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.** Holiness (*hagiasmos*) can mean both consecration and sanctification.

12:15 **lest any man fail of the grace of God.** To fail or ‘fall short’ of God's grace is not seek forgiveness through repentance and the Atonement of Christ.

12:18-20 Referring to the event in Exodus 19:12-13 where the children of Israel asked Moses to stand between them and God because they feared the word of the Lord.

12:23 **the general assembly and church of the firstborn.** See D&C 76:54, 67, 71, 94, 102; 77:11; 78:21; 88:5; 93:22; 107:19. The idea of a church of Christ that represents those whom God has saved is pervasive in the later

sections of the JST—but started in D&C 76, which was translated before Joseph Smith worked on Hebrews, the only place with that phrase in the Bible.

12:24 **better things than that of Abel**. Innumerable people will be saved through Christ's atonement. The reference to Abel in verse 24 makes it come full circle: Abel was the first person whose blood was shed, and his blood cried out to the Lord (Genesis 4:10). Now at the end, Jesus' blood was shed, and it, too, testifies to his righteousness and worthiness to mediate in our behalf.

Service, Obedience, and Greetings – Hebrews 13:1-19

13:2 **some have entertained angels unawares**. Though the footnote directs us to Luke 24 (the two disciples on the road to Emmaus), that was not truly an experience of entertaining angels. The better cross-reference is Genesis 18-19, where first Abraham and then Lot are hosts to messengers from God warning Abraham and then saving Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

13:3 **them which suffer adversity**. The author instructed the saints to remember those in bonds (alluding to his own situation) and those suffering adversity. As we lift one another's burdens, we are demonstrating true discipleship.

13:4 **Marriage is honourable in all**. The union of a man and wife is to be honored by all cultures and peoples.

13:4 **the bed undefiled**. Not a statement but an imperative, a command—"let the marriage bed be undefiled" (RSV), or 'let spouses be faithful to each other.'

13:5 **JST** "Let your ~~conversation~~ **consecrations** be without covetousness; and be content with **giving** such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

While the KJV speaks of general actions ("conversation" alludes to actions, not words in the KJV), the JST takes it to the more specific level of consecration. Speaking to the concept of consecration—giving our wills, our means, and our lives to God—the author taught to do so without covetousness, referring to a love of money.

13:8 **the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever**. This is the only use of this phrase in the Bible, but it is common in the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants (1 Nephi 10:18; 2 Nephi 2:4; 27:23; 29:9; Alma 31:17; Mormon 9:9; Moroni 10:19; D&C 20:12; 35:1).¹²

13:11-16 We are to symbolically leave the city (symbolizing being rejected by the world) and follow Christ, offering our own sacrifice, which is praise to him, to do good, and share the gospel with others. Giving up our life in the world prepares us for a greater one to come.

13:12 **suffered without the gate**. Meaning outside of the city gate, which is where Jesus was crucified. The word has the same meaning in verses 11 and 13.

13:16 **with such sacrifices God is well pleased**. Having established that Levitical sacrifices of animals and blood are fulfilled in Christ's Atonement, The author taught that "sacrifices" of praise, doing good, and fellowship (KJV "communicate") are pleasing to God.

13:17 **they watch for your souls**. The first sign of apostasy is the rejection of duly called and ordained leaders, who care for us and are anxious for our salvation.

Concluding Remarks – Hebrews 13:20-25

13:21 **Make you perfect in every good work**. The author closed with a prayer that the saints' good works would find perfection or completion in Christ.

¹² Wayment, *The New Testament*, Hebrews 13:8 note.

13:23 ***our brother Timothy is at liberty***. These verses are the strongest indication cited by many that Paul was the author of the letter. Though his name is never mentioned, the implication is that he worked closely with Timothy.

13:24 ***They of Italy salute you***. If Pauline authorship is accepted, this gives a date for the writing as being while Paul was in Rome, probably the first time.

James

The final letters in the New Testament (James-Jude) are referred to as the "General Epistles" or the "Catholic Epistles" ("Catholic" meaning 'universal' with no reference to a church) in that these letters are not addressed to specific people or churches and are non-Pauline. These letters are also placed at the end because there has sometimes been controversy associated with their canonicity over the years. James is not listed in the oldest list of what was considered scripture, the Muratorian Fragment. In the third century, Origen, an early church leader, acknowledged James as a disputed book, but quoted it extensively. In the 4th century, the historian Eusebius listed James as disputed, but his peer, Athanasius, accepted it as scripture. Jerome and Augustine both reluctantly accepted it in the 4th century, and from there it was included as scripture. During the Reformation, Luther questioned the value of James with its emphasis on works, calling it "a perfect straw-epistle."

James was written not by James of the gospels (the brother of John and son of Zebedee) who died relatively soon in the post-resurrection period (Acts 12:2), but rather James, the brother of Jesus (whose actual name was Jacob but got translated as James by William Tyndale for unknown reasons, and it stuck). The letter was perhaps written as early as the 40s to Jewish Christians who were scattered due to persecution in and around Jerusalem, where James was living. It may have been later but still preceded Matthew and Luke, based on internal evidence.¹³ If the first date is correct, James could be the first book of the New Testament written.

James is mentioned in the gospels, but only in a neutral or even negative tone—he doesn't appear to have been a follower of Jesus, his brother (Matthew 13:55; Mark 3: 21, 31-32; 6:1-4; John 7:2-5). Yet James was one of the first to see Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7) and soon became an apostle (though it's not clear if he was a member of the Twelve) and the apparent leader of the church in Jerusalem (perhaps something like a stake president or area authority seventy today; see Galatians 1:19 and Acts 15). The New Testament does not record his fate, but Josephus, a Jewish historian of the period, records that he was stoned in 62 CE after the high priest, Ananus II, convened the Sanhedrin and accused him of transgressing the Law.¹⁴

James' name has most recently been known in the media through the James ossuary, a first century bone box with the inscription "Jacob son of Joseph brother of Jesus." There is some lingering controversy whether this inscription is a forgery, but the publicity around it has brought the discussion about James to the forefront.¹⁵ The Catholic position that James was Jesus' step-brother (Joseph's son but not Mary's) is in keeping with their tradition that Mary remained a virgin. Linguistically, however, the New Testament uses the same term for James' and Jesus' relationship as they do for any brother. Jude (next week's lesson) is also Jesus' brother.

James is about faith—how trials build it, what its characteristics are, and how it is a power for good. Faith is manifest through our deeds. Both are needed to move toward perfection. When we submit ourselves to the will of God, we then have power to wait for the blessings from the Lord and to serve others.

The Institute manual has an interesting comparison of James and the Sermon on the Mount, showing a remarkable parallel between the two.¹⁶ James, who could have heard the Sermon in person when it was delivered, at least had his brother's teachings in mind when he wrote this letter.

Outline

1. Opening Address (1:1-8)
2. Enduring Trial (1:9-18)
3. Characteristics of Faith (1:19 – 5:6)
 - a. Quick to listen (1:19-27)
 - b. Do not show partiality (2:1-13)
 - c. Faith without works is dead (2:14-26)

¹³ Wayment, *The New Testament*, James, Author.

¹⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.9.1.

¹⁵ For more details about the ossuary, see Hershel Shanks, *The Brother of Jesus*.

¹⁶ *Life and Teachings*, 412-413.

- d. The tongue is a fire (3:1-12)
- e. Who is wise? (3:13-18)
- f. Be humble (4:1-10)
- g. Do not speak against a brother or sister (4:11-12)
- h. Boasting (4:13-17)
- i. Problems with riches (5:1-6)
- 4. The Power of Faith (5:7-20)
 - a. Be patient (5:7-12)
 - b. Confess your sins (5:13-20)

Greeting – James 1:1-8

1:1 **a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.** James' opening remark shows how far he had come, from being one who doubted Jesus' mission and abilities (John 7:2-5) to considering himself a slave of Jesus, totally committed to following his teachings.

1:1 **to the twelve tribes.** Some scholars interpret this to mean that James was only writing to other Jewish Christians, but Elder McConkie and others observe that "Israel" is a name for any who enter into the covenants of the gospel.¹⁷

1:2 **JST** "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into **many afflictions** ~~divers temptations~~;"

The Greek word translated "temptations" in the KJV is *peirasmos* which means 'trials' or 'proving'. It is a theme of James that faith and perfection come by being tested. See also verse 12.

1:4 **that ye may be perfect and entire.** As mentioned in the introduction, see the Institute manual for parallels from the Sermon on the Mount and James' teachings. That he doesn't quote Matthew or Luke (with his similar Sermon on the Plain) indicates that he didn't have access to their gospels but was working from a different source, perhaps his own memory.

1:5 **let him ask of God.** Is there any scripture that has had a greater impact on the salvation of men in our day? This verse triggered Joseph Smith's first attempt at vocal prayer which resulted in a vision of God and Christ and inaugurated the Restoration of the gospel (see Joseph Smith-History 1:11-20). If some early, uninspired church leaders had had their way, this verse and book would have been removed from the Bible and not available to a young New York farmboy. Thankfully, the Lord preserved James' letter for Joseph and us.

1:6 **nothing wavering.** James knew his subject personally, having doubted and wavered early in life then becoming anchored through faith and revelation later.

1:7 **let not that man.** Meaning, the one that wavers like a wave in the sea (v. 6).

1:8 **double minded.** In Greek, *dipsychos*, meaning 'two souled.'

Enduring Trial – James 1:9-18

1:9-10 As in the Church today, there were members in the first century who were rich and others who were poor. Wealth is not the issue, but attitude. The poor need to count their blessings, and the rich need to remain humble.

1:11 **so also shall the rich man fade away.** Not so much the man as his wealth: "so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away" (NASB).

1:13 **neither tempteth he any man.** God does not tempt us, but he does allow temptations and trials into our lives that we might learn and grow.

¹⁷ See McConkie, *DNTC*, 3:243 and Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 4:92.

1:14 **every man is tempted**. "As James describes man being influenced by his own lusts, he chooses two words that are vivid and descriptive of how Satan works upon men. The first word, translated as 'drawn out,' was used in hunting and was the word which described what the hunter did when he lured wild game out of the safety of the thick brush into an area set with snares. And the word 'entice' came from fishing and meant 'to bait, or to catch with bait.' How apt is the description, for the lusts of the flesh are designed to lure us out from the true safety of protective righteousness to become the victim of the evil hunter or fisherman."¹⁸

1:15 **sin, when it is finished bringeth forth death**. Unrepentant sin can only bring death—the second of which is separation from the presence of God.

1:17 **the Father of lights**. This is the only place in the NT that uses this title for God. It is also used in D&C 67:9.

Characteristics of Faith – James 1:19 – 5:6

Quick to listen – James 1:19-27

1:20 **the wrath of man**. "For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (NIV). James counsels being "slow to wrath" (v. 19) because anger is contrary to God's desires for righteousness.

1:21 **lay apart**. 'Put aside.' The JST uses "lay **aside** ~~apart~~."

1:21 **superfluity of naughtiness**. "the evil that is so prevalent" (NIV).

1:21 **the engrafted word**. 'The word planted in you'; compare Alma 32.

1:22 **be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only**. This is one of James' core arguments, that faith requires action, not just listening and agreeing.

1:23 **beholding his natural face in a glass**. *Esoptron* means 'mirror,' which in James' day was made of polished bronze. James' point is that a man who is a hearer and not a doer is like one who, seeing himself in the mirror and discovering something wrong (dirty face, hair not right, etc.), goes on his way without making any changes to his appearance (v. 24).

1:25 **the perfect law of liberty**. Not the Law of Moses but Christ's law, which brings freedom from sin.

1:27 **Pure religion and undefiled**. Notice the three things James listed as being the essential elements of "pure religion": 1. Be careful about what you say ("bridleth not his tongue" in verse 26); 2. Take care of widows and orphans; and, 3) Stay uncontaminated from the world (JST: "**the vices of the world**"). These summarize key points in the remainder of the letter.

Do not show partiality – James 2:1-13

2:1-4 James gave the specific example of two men who came to church: a rich man (with a gold ring and nice clothes) and a poor man (wearing dirty clothing). James asked if they treated the rich man differently than the poor? How about today? Suppose into our church walked a man in a white shirt and tie and nice suit, with a clean haircut and nice cologne, followed by a man in dirty clothes, with unkempt hair, and smelling like he hadn't bathed in weeks. What would our reaction be to each one? How would we treat them differently? James says to do so is to be "judges of evil thoughts" (v. 4).

2:1 **JST** "My brethren, **ye cannot** have ~~not~~ the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, **and yet have with** respect ~~to~~ **of** persons."

The change makes the message more clear—faith and a lack of charity are not compatible.

¹⁸ *Life and Teachings*, 408.

2:6 **Do not rich men oppress you.** After making the point that many poor are “rich in faith,” James reminds them that the rich of the world are persecuting the saints, so why would they favor such a person over the faithful poor?

2:8 **the royal law.** Today we call it the 'golden rule.' It is a "royal law" because it comes from the King of Kings (see Matthew 22:34-40 and Leviticus 19:18). Interestingly, in our day of political correctness, a new law has been created, sometimes called the 'platinum rule,' which is 'Do to others as they would have you do to them.'

2:9 **convinced of the law.** 'Convicted by the law.' The point of this verse and the next four is that if you break part of the law, you break it all. We are not allowed to pick our favorite commandments to keep and ignore others we don't like. Said Joseph Smith, "Any person who is exalted to the highest mansion has to abide a celestial law, and the whole law too."¹⁹

2:13 **he shall have judgment without mercy.** Or, "For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment" (NASB).

Faith without works is dead – James 2:14-26

We are not saved by faith or works, but by grace. But grace is applied as we grow in faith and works unto perfection (Millet, 212-213).

2:14-20 **JST:** "14 What ~~doth it~~ profit **is it**, my brethren, ~~for though~~ a man **to** say he hath faith, and ~~hath have~~ not works? can faith save him? 18 Yea, a man may say, **I will show thee I have** ~~Thou hast~~ faith **without**, and ~~I have~~ works; **but I will say**, shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. 15 **For** if a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 And one of you say ~~unto them~~, Depart in peace, be ~~ye~~ warmed and filled; notwithstanding ~~he ye~~ give them not those things which are needful to the body; what ~~doth it~~ profit **is your faith unto such?** 17 Even so faith, if it ~~have hath~~ not works, is dead, being alone. 20 **Therefore But** wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead **and cannot save you?** 19 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."**

A profession of belief means little if it does not include actions, especially caring for others.

2:14-16 Just saying to a naked and starving person, 'Have clothing, be warm, don't be hungry' won't make it so. A good analogy as to why you can't just say, 'I believe' and leave it there. Actions must accompany a declaration of faith for that faith to have any merit.

2:21-24 Abraham believed in God but didn't receive his full blessings until his faith was tried in the case of offering up Isaac. Only then “by works was [his] faith made perfect.” See Genesis 22:9-14.

2:25 **Rahab the harlot.** Rahab (Joshua 2) was an example of a woman who acted on her belief and was blessed by her actions. She and her family were saved in the conquest and destruction of Jericho and she became fully integrated into Israel. Perhaps she was chosen as an example along with Abraham as a contrast—“the patriarch and the prostitute”²⁰—yet both were saved by faith, manifest by their deeds.

2:26 **as the body without the spirit is dead.** One more comparison was offered: just as our bodies cannot be alive without our spirits, so faith cannot be alive without accompanying deeds of faithfulness.

The tongue is a fire – James 3:1-12

3:1 **be not many masters.** "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment" (NASB). Teachers teach truth, but continuing James' earlier point, teaching truth without acting on it could bring “the greater condemnation.”

¹⁹ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 331.

²⁰ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 4:103.

3:1 **JST** "My brethren, **strive** ~~be not for the mastery~~ ~~many masters~~, knowing that **in so doing** we shall receive the greater condemnation." "Mastery" is used three times in the Bible and only once in the NT in 1 Corinthians 9:25, where it speaks of athletic mastery or contending against difficulty. James' context in the JST change seems to be mastery of the words of the law without living the teachings learned.

3:3-5 Three metaphors to the power of words:

- How a bridle in a horse's mouth turns the whole horse
- How a small rudder turns a huge ship
- How a little spark can light a whole forest on fire ("matter" = 'forest')

3:8 **the tongue can no man tame**. James was not saying it is impossible to curb the tongue but was warning us how hard it can be. Hugh B. Brown shared this story:

A middle-aged couple on the farm had a violent quarrel at breakfast time. Later in the day they started for town in the buggy, with a fine team of horses to sell their vegetables and eggs. As the horses trotted along, Mary said, 'John, why can't we travel together like these horses do? They don't quarrel and fight.'

John said, "Mary, we could if there was only one tongue between us." He concluded, "Oh, the unkind things we say to those we love."²¹

The other aspect of this is profanity, as related by Dallin Oaks:

Satan seeks to discredit the sacred names of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, the names through which their work is done. He succeeds in a measure whenever he is able to influence any man or woman, boy or girl, to make holy names common and to associate them with coarse thoughts and evil acts. Those who use sacred names in vain are, by that act, promoters of Satan's purposes.²²

3:10 **Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing**. One day a man in an office near mine was angry at something that had happened and was swearing loudly and repeatedly. We could all hear him quite clearly, even though his door was closed. Finally, another office neighbor marched over, opened his door, and firmly said, "Is that the same mouth you use to kiss your mother?" The angry man was immediately remorseful for his outburst and apologized to all of us nearby. The office neighbor wasn't thinking of James' lesson here, I'm sure, but the concept was invoked just the same.

3:11-12 Other examples include a fountain that gives both salty and potable water and a fig tree that bears olives or a grape vine that gives figs. All of these are impossible, strengthening James' argument that we cannot say praises to God and curses to others with the same mouth, without condemnation. Mormon used a similar fountain analogy in Moroni 7:11, though with a somewhat different message—that of the impossibility of serving both God and the devil at the same time.

[Who is wise? – James 3:13-18](#)

3:13-18 James laid out the contrast between the feelings that come of envy and strife versus the fruits of the Spirit experienced through "the wisdom that is from above." The latter is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated [open to persuasion], full of mercy."

[Be humble – James 4:1-10](#)

It is impossible to satisfy greed, ambition, and lust, because no matter how much you have you always want more.

4:2-3 Punctuating this somewhat differently improves the understanding of the passage:

²¹ *Life and Teachings*, 409.

²² Dahl, "A String of Gospel Pearls (James)," in Millet, *Acts to Revelation*, 214.

'You want something but don't have it, so you kill. You desire to have something but can't obtain it, so you fight and quarrel. You don't have because you don't ask, but you ask and don't receive, because you ask in wickedness, only desiring to waste it on your lusts' (AT).

The antidote to such sinful feelings lies in the ability to submit to the will of God (v. 7). The effort must start with us, but then he fully reciprocates—and more (v. 8).

4:9 ***Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep.*** For our sins, leading to sincere repentance. As we do so, our sinful laughter is turned to mourning and our worldly joy to heaviness, but the result is that God will lift us up (v. 10).

Do not speak against a brother or sister – James 4:11-12

4:11 ***judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law.*** We are not to judge each other (Matthew 7:1); to do so places us above the law of Christ and therefore causes us to speak against it, because its message is love, not judgment. Only God can judge (v. 12).

Boasting – James 4:13-17

4:13 ***Go to now.*** Here and 5:1, this phrase is translated "Look here" (NLT) or "Now listen" (NIV).

4:15 ***If the Lord will, we shall live.*** I have known a few people in my life (Jewish and Muslim) who take this quite literally. When you plan a meeting or an activity, they say, 'I will come, God [or G-d] willing.' They recognize that they can make all the plans they want, but if God has other plans, they are at his mercy.

4:17 ***knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*** Knowledge is responsibility. As we learn more truth, we are obligated to live our lives according to that truth. If we do not, we are rejecting the very knowledge God has granted to us, and thus we are going against his will and sinning.

Problems with riches – James 5:1-6

5:1-6 A reminder to the rich that their wealth will do them no good in the end.

5:4 ***Lord of sabaoth.*** This is not 'Sabbath' but a transliteration of the Hebrew *tzava'ot*, meaning 'host' or 'multitude,' generally referring to armies, earthly or heavenly (e.g., Isaiah 5:9; 51:15). In our dispensation, the Lord also referred to himself by this title.²³

The Power of Faith – Hebrews 5:7-20

As farmers plant their crops and patiently wait for the harvest, so we need to strengthen and make firm our hearts in anticipation of the coming of the Lord.

Be patient – James 5:7-12

5:7 ***the coming of the Lord.*** This is the *parousia*, a Greek term referring to the triumphal return of a king and generally applied by Christians to the Second Coming of Jesus.

5:9 ***Grudge not one against another.*** 'Grumble' is a better word here.

5:9 ***the judge standeth before the door.*** A reference to the judgment associated with the Second Coming.

5:10 ***an example of suffering affliction.*** The prophets are great scriptural examples of those who endured sufferings and trials for the sake of their testimonies. Job is the classic example of patience in suffering (v. 11).

5:12 ***swear not.*** The issue is not making oaths but making them without the intention of keeping them. See Matthew 5:34-37 for Jesus' similar injunction.

²³ D&C 87:7; 88:2; 95:7; 98:2; see *Life and Teachings*, 410, and Ogden and Skinner, *Verse by Verse: Acts to Revelation*, 270.

Confess your sins – James 5:13-20

5:13 **any among you afflicted?** James provided a string of conditions with suggested solutions. For those afflicted (suffering hardships), he recommended prayer.

5:13 **any merry?** The 'solution' for being merry is to sing psalms! The Primary song is, "If you're happy and know it, shout hooray!"

5:14 **any sick among you?** "Sick" is *astheneō* which refers to both physical and spiritual weakness. Priesthood blessings are appropriate in both kinds of need.

5:14 **anointing him with oil.** The use of olive oil has a long history in the scriptures. Kings were anointed with it; prophets were consecrated with it; buildings were even dedicated with it. Jesus taught his apostles to heal the sick with oil (Mark 6:13) and James here highlighted its use. As with water in baptism or bread and water in the sacrament, the oil itself has no true value in healing the sick—it is "the prayer of faith" (v. 15) that is the source of power. Oil is a physical or outward symbol of God's particular concern for that person. It is also symbolic of the power of the Atonement, since Messiah/Christ means 'the anointed one.' Oil should be used for such blessings whenever available, but the prophets have taught that blessings can be given without oil in times of emergency.²⁴

5:17 **Elias.** Or, Elijah (see 1 Kings 17-18).

5:20 **shall save a soul.** Sins are forgiven when we share the gospel with others; compare D&C 62:3. President Kimball taught that it is not only the act of sharing the gospel that brings forgiveness, but that "in changing the lives of others our own lives cannot help but be lifted. One can hardly help another to the top of the hill without climbing there himself."²⁵

Bibliography

Abbreviations:

- AT – Author's translation
- BYU – BYU New Rendition
- CJB – Complete Jewish Bible
- ESV – English Standard Version
- JST – Joseph Smith Translation
- KJV – King James Version
- LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
- NAB – New American Bible
- NASB – New American Standard Bible
- NIV – New International Version
- NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
- NLT – New Living Translation
- NRSV – New Revised Standard Version
- TNT – William Tyndale 1534 New Testament
- TW – Thomas Wayment translation

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²⁴ Odgen and Skinner, *Verse by Verse: Acts to Revelation*, 271-274; Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 116.

²⁵ Dahl, "A String of Gospel Pearls," in Millet, *Acts to Revelation*, 222.

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