

# True Religion: A study in the book of James (Jacob)

## Part 2

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**Author:** James, brother of Jesus

**Audience:** Jewish Christians (extended to all Christians)

**Date:** AD 45-47 (along with Galatians, the earliest writings of the NT)

**Type of Literature:** A Wisdom Letter (reads more like a sermon addressing crucial topics)

**Major Themes:** Wisdom, trials, the law, faith and works poverty and wealth

James (Jacob) is less concerned about giving us new theology and more about giving us a spiritual “wake up call” by offering revelation and challenging believers in regard to how we ought to live.

Again, this letter is actually titled “Jacob.” By calling this book James instead of Jacob the church can lose a vital component of our Jewish beginnings. There is no “James” in Greek; it is Jacob. We would never say that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and James. So, if you want to start calling the letter Jacob, it would seem you’d have the green light to do so.

James (Jacob) gives us practical truths about what it means to be declared righteous by God. He gives us many clear insights on faith and walking in the truth. We could view this book as the NT version of Proverbs, again the half-brother of Jesus gaining much of his inspiration for this writing from Proverbs and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), for much of his writings speak of God’s heavenly wisdom that can transform us.

### **James, Chapter 2**

V. 1-13- **Favoritism vs Love** (Matt. 5:46-48)

### **James 2:1-13 (ESV)**

“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes

in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? **If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.** For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. **So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."**

### **"Perfect Torah"**

Jesus transforms believers into a new humanity that listens to and obeys God's Word, the Perfect Torah that motivates us to love God and others. James (Jacob) doesn't refer directly to the law of the OT but he does refer to "the royal law" in verse 8. He writes of "loving your neighbor as yourself," the law that Jesus gave in His teachings, as He was the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets (Matt. 5:17-20). So for James (Jacob), anything that violates this law is as serious as violating any of the Ten Commandments. The law is relevant to Christian living not as legalistic rules and rituals, but as love of neighbor and God.

### **Matthew 5:46-48 (ESV)**

"For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the

same? **You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**”

“Perfect” Repeated 7 Times in James

Hebrew: Tamim / Greek: Teleios (Wholeness & Integrity vs. Fractured & Inconsistent)

V. 14-26- **Genuine Faith** (Matt. 7:21-27)

**James 2:14-26 (ESV)**

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? **So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.** But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? **Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?** You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. **You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.** And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? **For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.**”

### **Favoritism and Love**

Believers who say they have faith in God will always obey Jesus’ teachings and love others, not show favoritism or neglect the poor and needy.

***Faith and Good Deeds.*** One of the ongoing debates with Jacob's (James') letter is whether it contradicts the teachings of Paul and his theology of salvation by faith alone. While some of what Jacob says may seem like a contradiction, it isn't. Instead of undermining and opposing Paul's teaching that works cannot save, Jacob explains the kind of faith that does. "Faith that doesn't involve action is phony," Jacob argues. Faith that saves is a faith that works!

***Poverty and Wealth.*** One of the major concerns of Jacob (James) seemed to be the huge gap between the rich and poor, even within the church. He encourages poor believers that they have been blessed with every privilege from God, though society may dismiss them. And to the rich he reminds them no amount of wealth from below could buy what they've been given from above. Jacob also writes against favoritism in the church of any kind, especially based on the size of one's pocketbook or the brand of their clothes.

### **Matthew 7:21-27 (ESV)**

""Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.""