

James – Introduction (part three) – Theology and Themes

1. It could be stated by a simple reader of James that the book has no theology or that the theology in the book of James is not complete or developed.
2. It is safe to say that if James was written in the 40's AD (44-47 AD) that many of the theological debates that helped standardize Christian theology and refute heresies had not yet taken place.
3. But, that is different than saying James has incomplete or zero theology.
4. It is also true that the book of James does not address every area of theology.
5. But, it is obvious that James held to a theology that was consistent with the Old Testament, in agreement with the teaching of Jesus and that would hold fast without need of adjustment as the rest of the New Testament letters were written.
 - a. So, we understand that there is a precise alignment of OT and NT theology which means there are very similar boundaries between the theology of Judaism in the first century and Christianity.
6. James theology can be identified in these areas from the material he wrote in the book of James.
7. James is addressing specific issues and areas that need Christian maturity. James is not writing theology, but there is enough written to realize James's response, advice and commands are rooted in theology.
8. James is not evangelizing unbelievers. James is not writing apologetics to debate with the non-believer. James is writing to believers who are in the church (or, assembly, community, congregation) that have already accepted the "theology", but need encouragement and direction for maturing and developing the "theology" that claim to have accepted.
9. James concerns addressed in this letter (determined by location and time) are different than Paul's (location and time) and John's (location and time).
 - a. James – a pastor, 40's AD, Eastern side of Mediterranean Sea, Jewish readers
 - b. Paul – an apostle, 50's AD, Asia, Greece, Italy, Gentile readers
 - c. John – an apostle overseeing churches, 90's AD, Asia, Jews and Gentile readers
10. James is not presenting and developing theories (the exalted Christ), but applying accepted truth.

1. God

- a. God is a person
- b. God has a nature
- c. God's personal nature are revealed in his word and determine his plan and purpose in our lives and in history. The book of James is rooted in this fact.
- d. Christians are to live fully aware of God's nature and live in line with God's nature. This is the backbone of the book.
- e. 1:5 – God gives generously without finding fault so believers should ask for wisdom.
 - i. Jesus says a very similar thing in Matthew 7:7-11
- f. 1:17 – God is good and his gifts are good.
- g. 1:17 – God is unchanging
- h. 1:13 – God is not enticed by evil, so God cannot entice someone else with evil.

- i. 2:19 – The oneness of God when James writes, “You believe that God is one; you do well.” And, again, in 4:12, “There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy.”
 - i. Jesus, is the Coming One who is the “Judge...standing at the door”

2. Christology

- a. Jesus is mentioned and identified as the Lord in two places:
 - i. 1:1 – “
 - ii. 2:1 – “
 - iii. James uses “Lord” – *kurios* – to refer to:
 - 1. Jesus – 4x – 1:1; 2:1; 5:7, 8 (if we understand the Coming Judge to be Jesus)
 - 2. God – 10x - 1:7; 3:9; 4:10, 15; 5:4, 10, 11 (2x), 14, 15
- b. James does not mention Jesus’s death or resurrection.

3. Anthropology

- a. 1:14-15 – Man is tempted by his own evil nature and desires.
 - i. Man’s nature produces sin.
 - ii. Man’s sin produces death.
- b. The conflict of man’s nature with God’s nature is called “worldliness” (4:4-10)

4. Eschatology

- a. There will be a future judgment which means the believers should take right action now:
 - i. 1:10-11 – “and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also, will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.”
 - ii. 2:12-13 – “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.”
 - iii. 3:1 – “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”
 - iv. 5:1-6 – “...their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days...”
 - v. 5:9 – “Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”
 - vi. 5:12 – “...let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.”
- b. Jesus’s return is expected in
 - 5:7-8 – “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”
- c. Jesus had come the first time to begin the end times. Jesus’s return is near when he will complete the end times.
- d. There is a future kingdom in 2:5 – “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?”
- e. Current eschatology is recognized in James since:

- i. Jesus had already come
- ii. God had already chosen those who are poor and they will inherit the kingdom.
- iii. The “royal law” (or, the Law of the Kingdom) was already known and would be enforced according to 2:8 – “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.

5. **Pneumatology** (Holy Spirit)

- a. James never refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit, but we have “the spirit that he has made to dwell in us” which would be the Holy Spirit that he has sent to live in us.
- b. James does connect the jealousy of the Holy Spirit for believers with a similar jealousy of God for the Temple, Jerusalem and the Jewish people of Zechariah 8:2.
 - i. James 4:5 – “Do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, ‘He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us’ ”?
 - ii. Zechariah 8:2 – “This is what the Lord Almighty says: “I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.”

6. **Suffering and Testing**

7. **Poverty and Wealth**

- a. In the OT and in Jewish culture it is understood that:
 - i. God is concerned for the poor and outcasts as stated in Ps. 68:5 – “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation,” and Deut. 10:18 – “He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.
 - ii. The people of God are required to portray this same concern for the poor.
 - 1. Commanded in Deut 10:19 – “Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.”
 - 2. Rebuked in Amos 2:6-7 – “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals — those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted.”
 - 3. The poor are associated with the righteous as in Luke 6:20 – “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”
 - a. The wealthy and rich are often associated with the wicked because they have used the system of the world and worldly ways to acquire their wealth.
 - i. Luke 6:24 – “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.”
 - b. The wealthy wicked oppress the righteous poor.
- b. The application of a simple formula such as “poverty=righteousness” and “wealth=evil” has several hurdles to clear and cannot be applied conclusively. For example:
 - i. The rich man in James’s church must have been a believer himself.
 - ii. Prosperity, especially enduring prosperity, is also obtained by living righteously and doing things the way God designed them.
 - iii. Prosperity is a reward from God
 - iv. Wickedness and rebellion to God’s natural law will lead to chaos, poverty, destruction and death in the world.
- c. The application of James’s teaching should not be separated from his time and location. The believer in Jesus Christ would be marginalized in the Jewish community. This

would have resulted in loss of business, inheritance and associations. This means the believers would have had to become day laborers working for the rich in fields and businesses of the rich. The “poor” again in this case were the “righteous” believers suffering for their righteousness and association with the Lord. The “rich” were the “wicked” unbelievers who had not faced the same persecution.

8. The Law and the Word of God

- a. The Law of Moses (Torah) is assumed in James and is the foundation for James’s teaching.
- b. The Law and the Word are used as synonyms.
 - i. 1:25 – “the perfect law that gives freedom”
 - ii. 2:8 – the believers were violating the “royal law” (2:8)
 - iii. 2:10-11 – James states the unity of the Law – “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.”
 - iv. 2:12 – James speaks to those who will be judged by the law of freedom: “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.”
- c. At no point does James ever make a reference to obedience to the ritual of the Law. James’s focus is on the commands towards character and behavior. The focus again is on believers having the nature of God.
- d. James could be said to have written before Paul that believers have died to the Law, but are yet responsible to fulfill the character of the God revealed in the Law..

9. Law, Grace and Faith, Justification

- a. This is one of the issues that has been labeled a conflict with other NT writings, but it is not. James is focused on phase two of salvation referred to as temporal sanctification in theology. Paul might call it “spiritual” or “mature”.
- b. The Law is mentioned in three passages:
 - i. 1:25 – “But the one who looks into **the perfect law**, the **law of liberty**, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”
 - ii. 2:8-12 – “If you really fulfill **the royal law according to the Scripture**, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well... For whoever keeps the **whole law** but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it... So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under **the law of liberty**.”
 - iii. 4:11-12 – “The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against **the law** and judges **the law**. But if you judge **the law**, you are not a doer of **the law** but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy.
- c. The Law in James is simply assumed to be known and understood. James does not argue for or against the Law. He writes as though the readers were striving to attain the goal of the Law.
- d. James, like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, has no interest in the ceremonial aspects of the OT Law, but is insistent on the moral commands of the Law of Moses → See chart on back page.
 - i. James is similar to Jesus’s teaching in Matthew, but it is clear he is not depending on Jesus’s words (or, Matthew’s text) as his literary basis.

- ii. James is interpreting the Law in with the same view as Jesus.
 - iii. James and Jesus both understand eschatology the same and see this age as a conflict with Satan. They both have a hope for a future age of the kingdom on earth. This view requires we persevere and endure until the end.
- e. The Law in the book of James is the foundation for ethical commands. This is a position Paul would have found acceptable.
- f. Salvation does not come from the Law, it comes from the “implanted word” which must be “received in meekness” (1:21 – “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.)
 - i. This must be followed with growth and production.
 - ii. Mere profession of “religion” is worthless (1:26-27 – “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”)
 - 1. Saved by grace, the word, faith.
 - 2. Purified and made perfect by performing the ethical requirements of the Law (which reveals the nature and character of God, who is your deliverer.)
- g. Paul is against the works of the Law, but Paul totally expects the “fruits” of the Law:
 - i. Galatians 2:16 and 5:6 – “yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”...” For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”
 - ii. Galatians 5:14, 18, 22-23 – “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”... “if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law”... “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

10. Prayer

- a. Believers are encouraged to approach God because he:
 - i. Gives good gifts
 - ii. Delights to answer the requests
- b. Condition to approach and ask God is “faith” (1:16; 5:14)
- c. Selfish requests with worldly connections will not move God to act (4:3)
- d. God does not demand special conditions or make impossible demands of us before we pray since we are like Elijah with human weaknesses, misunderstandings and doubts. Elijah’s prayer was effective because he was a righteous man. (6:16-18)

11. Wisdom

- a. 1:5 – believers are to ask for wisdom. Here it is likely to understand their trials/suffering and know how to respond
- b. Wisdom is the ability to receive insight into God’s purposes and ways.
- c. Possessing wisdom leads the believer to spiritual maturity.

- d. 3:13-18 focuses on wisdom.
- e. Wisdom that “comes from above” is contrasted with wisdom that is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic” in 3:15, 17
- f. Wisdom is manifested in behavior
 - i. Wisdom that “comes from above is (3:17):
 - 1. Humble
 - 2. Desire to do good works
 - 3. Pure
 - 4. Peace-loving
 - 5. Considerate
 - 6. Submissive
 - 7. Full of mercy
 - 8. Good fruit
 - 9. Impartial
 - 10. sincere
 - ii. Wisdom that is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic” manifests as (3:15):
 - 1. selfish
 - 2. contentious
 - 3. disorder
 - 4. every evil practice
- g. In Proverbs 8:22-36 wisdom takes on a personality as a mediator between God and man with almost divine characteristics.
- h. Wisdom is the term James uses when Paul refers to the Spirit. The association with the Spirit and Wisdom is seen in the OT:
 - i. Isaiah 11:2 – “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord.”
 - ii. James refers to the “fruit of wisdom” (3:17) as Paul refers to the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23.

12. The Christian Life

- a. James focuses on Christian ethics more than any NT book.
- b. James’s ethics find their foundation on:
 - i. God’s nature
 - ii. Eschatology
- c. James sees his readers as “born again” (phase one) (1:18 – “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”), but not yet “saved” or “delivered” (phase two or three) (1:12 – “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”)
- d. The believer is “divided” or “double-minded”. Thus, having two natures: Righteous and Sin. The believers are called to continue towards the righteous nature and leave behind the sin nature
- e. Believers must not only hear the word, but they must do the word. (1:22)
- f. Faith that is real is a faith that produces works. (2:14-26)

<i>James</i>	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Luke</i>
1:2	5:11-12	6:23
1:4	5:48	
1:5	7:7	11:9
1:6	21:21	
1:12	10:22	
1:17	7:11	11:13
1:20	5:22	
1:21		8:8
1:22	7:24	6:46-47
1:23	7:26	6:49
2:5	5:3, 5; 11:5	6:20; 7:22
2:6		18:3
2:8	22:39-40	
2:10	5:19	
2:11	5:21-22	
2:13	5:7	
2:15	6:25	
3:12	7:16	6:44, 45
3:18	5:9	
4:2	7:7	
4:3	7:7-8; 12:39	
4:4	6:24	16:13
4:8	6:22	
4:9	5:4 ?	6:25
4:10	23:12	14:11; 18:14
4:11-12	7:1	6:37
4:13-14	6:34	
4:17		12:47
5:1		6:24-25
5:2	6:19-20	6:37; 12:33
5:6		6:37
5:8	24:3, 27, 39	
5:9	5:22; 7:1; 24:33	
5:10	5:11-12	6:23
5:12	5:34-37	
5:17		4:25
MORE GENERAL PARALLELS IN THOUGHT		
1:9-10; 4:10	18:4; 23:12	9:40; 14:11; 22:26
1:26-27; 2:14-26	7:21-23	
2:14-16	25:31-46	
3:1-12	12:36-37	
3:13-18	11:19	
4:17	12:47	
5:5		16:19
5:7		
5:19	18:15	17:3