

Notes on

A Letter of Jacob

The Letter of Jacob has an interesting place in the New Testament. First of all, it was written reasonably early. Secondly, the letter is often called "universal" because it was not addressed to one specific group; yet it was written to address very specific problems within the church. Thirdly, there are no gentiles in focus throughout the letter. And fourthly, Paul's letter to the Romans appears to address issues brought up by people who were (deliberately?) misinterpreting Jacob's letter.

Authorship and Date:

One theory is that the letter was written by Jacob, Jesus' brother. However, this theory has no support, either internally or externally. The author appears to be at somewhat of a greater distance from Jesus, although he certainly appears to have known him.

Others have suggested a Jacob not mentioned in the gospels who was possibly a Hellenist. Yet the author fails to explain himself. Certainly, he writes as though he is well-known to the readers. Since he appears to expect the letter to be circulated throughout the Jewish community, his identification as an unknown seems unlikely.

Another possibility is Jacob "the Greater," brother to Johannes and son of Zebediah. He is definitely possible as the author of the work, and the lack of focus on gentiles might substantiate this. However, one might argue that Jesus' brother was prominent before Saul's conversion and that his deeds before that time went largely unrecorded (due to Lukas' own priority in writing the Actions of the Envoys).

At any rate, the date of the writing is easier to pin down. Jacob's letter must have circulated rather well before his meeting with Paulus in Acts 15 (c. 47-9 CE). At that time, he and Jacob appear to have discussed the topic of God's generosity and come to an agreement. In Galatians, Paulus writes not that Jacob himself had any problem with him, but "men from Jacob," indicating that Paulus appeared to have no quarrel with Jacob himself. The letter, too, indicates no differences with Jacob. But both Romans and Galatians presuppose Jacob's prominence. Given, too, the wholly Jewish nature of the book, and the use of terminology that almost excludes gentiles, if Jesus' brother wrote the letter, he may well have done so before Paulus came into prominence. If Johannes' brother wrote the letter, then this is definitely the case, since he meets his end in Acts 12. This is the approximate time of writing for the letter: before 45 CE.

Background for Writing:

Jacob saw a problem within God's community that needed to be addressed. In the Jewish community, wealth was often viewed as a sign of spiritual blessing. Consequently, it was very easy for those who were wealthy to be complacent, seeing themselves as having God's blessing. Jacob's subjects were certainly this way, for it appears that at the instigation of certain wealthy

Jews, they were mistreating the poor among them. Jacob then wrote a letter emphasizing the importance of love among God's people--a theme very similar to that of Johannes. He made the specific application that followers of the Anointed One must help one another, both physically and in other ways. In preparing for these applications, Jacob waxes theoretical about the importance of maintaining proper conduct. After all, how can a person be godly without exhibiting a godly lifestyle?

Structure of the Letter:

Jacob is straightforward, laying down his points with sufficient (but not overly wordy) proof. These lead to his inevitable conclusion: that Christians must demonstrate love for one another.

1. It is impossible to trust or to love God without loving your brother/sister.
2. If any social class is to be maligned, it is the wealthy. But all classes are equal, and so we must not harbor bigotry.
3. We cannot judge one another harshly; instead, we should help one another.
4. We should assist one another in many ways.

Jacob issues many imperatives ("commands") throughout the short letter. Many of the things he has in mind are straight out of Jesus' core teachings (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount). The author appears to have these principles fresh in his mind, and he expects that they are well-known to the readers also.

Commentary:

*Jacob, a slave of God and of Lord Anointed Jesus
To those twelve tribes that are in the dispersion.*

1:1 Hello. Regard it as all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various trials, knowing that the proof of your trust works out patience. Now let patience complete its work, so that you may be complete and whole, lacking nothing. But if any one of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God (who gives generously to all) and not say foul things, and it will be given to him.

But he should ask in trust -- indeed, not hesitating. For the one who hesitates is like an ocean wave: blown and tossed about. For that person should not think that he will receive something from the Lord. He is a man who has a double life, unstable in all of his ways.

The form is quite typical. The author identifies himself and addresses the recipients of the letter, who are Messianic Jews scattered around the region.

After the greeting, the author implores patience. He will return to this theme at various points in the letter. These Messianic Jews were being asked to wait until the time when Priestly Judaism would be removed from the world scene, leaving them to be revealed as God's people. Until that time, there would be opposition from those who would not acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and from those who had once made such an acknowledgement but had been persuaded to return to ritual religion.

Therefore, Jacob advises the readers to ask God about such things. After all, God would grant the wisdom to understand, since he is the source of all good things. The focus of Messianic life is to do everything according to trust and love. Consequently, the author reminds his readers that if anyone should ask for something from God, he should patiently ask in trust, knowing that God will provide. Clearly, some of his readers were beginning to doubt God's promises.

With a remark about hesitation, Jacob prepares to move on. Hesitation is like being tossed about on the waves with no clear direction. Hesitation is unstable. One ought to ask God confidently and trustingly for guidance, and God will provide. An unsure person will receive an unsure answer from God.

Now let the humble brother boast in his height; but let the wealthy one boast in his humility, because he will pass away like the flower of a plant. (For the sun rose with its heat and withered the plant, and its flower fell off, and the beauty of its face was destroyed.) In this way also, the wealthy person in his goings-on will fade away.

Jacob uses "humble" to indicate poverty -- a man of humble means. The words "height" and "humility" (lowness) are then used with a double meaning. The impoverished person has few possessions, but he has richness of character that is worth boasting about.

Now the author is not urging that anyone should brag about himself, but he is "turning the tables" on the social ethic of the day. If you think that wealth is a sign of God's blessing, if you believe that possessions equate to prosperity in God's eyes, think again. Poor people have something valuable, but that wealth is not physical. Similarly, the wealthy people should not revel in their wealth, because only what is spiritual will remain. Instead, a devout rich person takes time to realize that he needs God.

Briefly, the readers are given an analogy about the relative worthlessness of physical property. Ultimately, the test of time will cause wealth to be worthless; its attractiveness in this life will amount to nothing. So too will the person who seeks wealth in this life "fade away." Therefore, pursuing such things is a waste of time.

Blessed is the man who is continuing under trial, because since he has become approved, he will get the crown of life which the Lord promised to those who love him. No one who is undergoing trial should say that, "I am being tried by God," for God is not tested by bad things, and he puts no one to the test. But each one is tested by his own strong desire--lured out and trapped. Then when the strong desire has conceived, it has sin as a child. Now when sin is completely grown, it brings about death.

Knowing that the readers would find it difficult to reject the wealthy and their riches -- an ideal so valued in their culture -- and instead accept the reproach of their countrymen around them. Most of them appear to have regarded their relatively poor situation as a test from God, perhaps making an analogy between themselves and the situation of Job, whose property was taken away because of the intervention and testing of the Enemy.

Believing that the Enemy was responsible for their poverty would have been a mistake, but it might have been harmless. The danger envisioned by Jacob is that his readers might believe first that poverty is bad, then blame God for making them poor. So, after disputing the idea that wealth is good (and poverty bad), the author jumps on the notion that God punishes someone or tests someone by making him poor.

Continuing to adhere to one's principles (love and trust) in rough times is a blessing, because God approves of the development of such strong character traits. Instead of blaming God, the readers ought to realize that the desire for wealth isn't godly in the first place. The desire to become wealthy is an evil to be resisted, and so everyone that feels "tested" because of his poverty should recognize that that emotion is being caused by themselves -- by their own desires. If that desire is allowed to go unchecked, it leads to sin (the craving of greed). As the author has already pointed out, the person who devotes himself to wealth in this life will not live to see the next.

Don't be led astray, my beloved brothers. Each good present and each complete gift is from above--coming down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is not one change or shade of alteration. Since he wanted it so, he made us children by a message of truth, in order for us to be a certain first fruit of his creatures. And so, my beloved brothers, now let each person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to be enraged. For a man's rage does not work out God's justice.

Every good thing comes from God, but wealth isn't necessarily a good thing. Instead of looking for wealth, the readers should look instead at the beauty of the good message that they were given. That spiritual Torah is greater than any gold or property. Should the readers become angry with the wealthy people who are trying to lure them back to their former life? No, for the message is not of anger but of love. Therefore, it is necessary to live according to the spiritual message.

So, put away all filthiness and abundance of that which is bad, and embrace in meekness the implanted message--the one which is able to save your lives. But become doers of the message, and not only hearers who are making rationalizing statements to themselves. Because if someone is a hearer of the message and is not a doer, this one is like a man who perceives in a mirror the face that he was born with. For he perceived himself, and went away, and immediately forgot what kind of person he was. But the one who has stepped down close to a completed Torah--that of freedom--and who continues along (not becoming a hearer of forgetfulness, but a doer of work), this one will be blessed in what he does.

The desire for wealth is "filthy," and every one of the Jewish readers would recognize the prohibitions in the Torah against handling what was dirty, stained, and useless. Jacob urges them to recognize this and to turn instead to the message of love, the message that results in eternal life instead of death.

They should embrace that message not reluctantly or with anger against the people around them but with meekness -- the attitude of submissiveness toward God. For it is not enough for the Messianic Jew to know in his head that the Torah is summed up by trust and love; these are principles by which life must be lived.

What if someone knows these things but doesn't live by them? Jacob describes such a person as being so ridiculously forgetful that he sees his own reflection and knows who he is, but the moment he steps away from the mirror, he forgets what he looks like! How can someone realize that life is trust and love, yet not live by that precept? He cannot.

Jesus taught that the spiritual Torah of love and trust makes the written Torah complete. Merely knowing that signifies nothing, but whoever practices the spiritual Torah has stepped out of a life of enslavement by ritual religion into a life of freedom. Therefore, God blesses those who keep the spiritual Torah (genuinely). It is this permanent blessing and not the temporary pretended blessing of property and money that the readers need to focus on.

If anyone considers himself to be devout without restraining his tongue--deceiving his heart instead--this person's devotion is worthless. This is clean and undefiled devotion with God (that is, the Father): to oversee orphans and widows in their affliction; to keep one's self unspotted by the creation.

Restraining one's tongue might have been intended to apply to the above section on not becoming angry. However, when the author returns to the thought later, he definitely means it differently. It is bad enough to want wealth for one's self, but when someone begins to publically ally himself with the "give me money" maxim, then that person has wandered from the truth. The readers were asked to fight off the unclean urges to revere riches. The people at whom this is directed have gone even further down the path to destruction. They are praising wealth publically and avoiding those who are poor (as though there were something wrong with the impoverished).

Putting a "wealth is good" philosophy into practice is just a way of deceiving the heart. You might think you're still being godly, but your devotion is worthless. If you're part of a group where the wealthy are given extra respect, Jacob says you're not really devoted to God. Instead, what God (as Father) wants is for his people to help the needy among them. Wallowing in the opinion that wealth equals prosperity is a stain on one's life, but avoiding such things and treating both rich and poor as equals -- that keeps a person "unspotted" from the creation, which is the rebellion against God.

My brothers, do not hold the trust in our Lord of Glory, Anointed Jesus, with personal bias. For if a man enters into your gathering wearing gold rings and dressed in a luxurious robe, but also a poor man enters in dirty clothing, and if you look at the one wearing the luxurious robe and say, "You sit here in honor," and to the poor man you say, "You stand over there," or, "Sit beneath my footstool," aren't you discriminating among yourselves and becoming judges because of evil reasonings?

Sometimes we see this still today. Who has more clout in the group? The wealthy person? If that's the case, says Jacob, the group is discriminatory -- bigoted -- and is acting not out of love but out of evil reasonings. It doesn't matter whether someone has property or not, and if we discriminate, then we become judges of one another and of the Torah itself.

2:5 Hear me, my beloved brothers: didn't God choose out the poor of creation, who are rich in trust and are heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor.

If you pick the wealthy to favor, then God picks the poor. Because of their deep trust, as the author has already said, God looks upon them with generosity. Through their trust, they are saved and made heirs of the whole kingdom. Yet the readers' group had dishonored the poor -- they had treated them with low esteem although God saw fit to do otherwise.

Aren't the wealthy the ones who exert power over you and drag you into courts of justice? Don't they speak evil of that nice name that was named on you? If indeed you are keeping a royal law (according to the writing, "You will love your neighbor as yourself,") you are doing nicely. But if you show personal bias, you are working sin and are convicted under the Torah as wanderers.

"Why on earth would you favor the wealthy?" This section reminds the readers that the poor aren't the ones who "exert power" and "drag you into courts." The poor aren't the ones who publically slander the readers. No, the wealthy were the ones doing that, and yet some of the readers were currying favor with them.

Jesus had summarized the Torah in the principle of love. Jacob cites that principle, calling it a "royal code" (or "royal law"). In other words, it is superior to the sort of legal code found in the courts, and it is great among the teachings in the Torah. However, personal bias is contrary to that teaching of love. It is not the wealthy who can convict such people, but the Torah itself. Bigotry is evil.

For whoever keeps the whole Torah but who fails at one thing has become guilty of them all. For the one who said "Do not commit adultery" said also, "Do not murder." Now if you don't commit adultery but you murder, you have become someone who has wandered away from the Torah.

People tend to "rank" their sins. "Oh, that one's not so big." The Torah itself provides different punishments for different transgressions. However, if someone intentionally abandons the teachings of the Torah on one thing, he is still abandoning God's principles. It doesn't matter that he chose to be an adulterer but not a murderer. Or, in this application, choosing to depart from the principle of love by being bigoted is still something dangerous, even if you're not a murderer.

Speak like this and act like this: as though you are about to be judged by a law of freedom. For judgment is merciless for the one who has not practiced mercy. Mercy brags of its superiority over judgment.

Instead of judging one another (and the Torah) in ways that are discriminatory, Jacob admonishes his readers to speak and act (and think) in a manner that looks ahead to their own coming judgment. This is a code (law) "of freedom," in that we are judged by trust and love, rather than by our every misdeed. However, if we insist on not loving and not trusting, then we will be judged by our deeds. Instead of the mercy that we would receive, we will instead be treated mercilessly.

"Do you really want to be judged by your deeds?" The rhetorical question is coming. For it is so superior to be judged by trust and to receive mercy than it is to be judged by our deeds that "mercy brags of its superiority."

What is the profit, my children, if someone says they have trust, but they have no deeds? Is the trust able to save him? If a brother or sister should be naked and lacking the day's food, but if someone from among you says, "Go away peacefully. Be warmed and well fed," but if you don't give them what their bodies need, what is the profit?

Here's another matter of argument. Does it make any sense if someone says they trust God, but their lives show nothing of the sort? How does it help anyone if that is the case? Naturally, that person's trust does no good for himself, and the author has already covered that, but does it do any good at all? His example is extreme but simple: if someone is drastically impoverished, does it do any good to **tell** him to be warmed and well fed? No, that person needs food and shelter. Therefore, it does no good at all for someone to claim to practice love and trust when the reality is that their claims are all talk. It is necessary to put that so-called trust into action.

And trust is this way. If it has no deeds, it is dead by itself. However, someone will say, "You have trust, and I have deeds." Show me your trust without deeds, and I will show you trust from my deeds. You trust, because there is one God. You are doing nicely. The spirit beings also trust and tremble. But do you want to know, worthless human, that the trust is dead without the deeds?

Here, Jacob states the tenet for which he is most famous, that trust is dead without deeds. It is impossible for trust to be inactive. If someone trusts in God and in his Anointed One, then he must practice the principles of love and trust. More simply, if you aren't practicing the principles, then you have nothing at all. Somewhere along the line, you may have had trust, but it is dead.

Anticipating their retort, the author makes it for them. Jacob may have his deeds, but these people have trust, and after all, trust is important -- superior. But Jacob says that the two go hand in hand. True, deeds by themselves mean nothing, but trust cannot exist by itself. Therefore, he demands, "Show me your trust without deeds, and I will show you trust from my deeds." What a person does -- the type of life that he leads -- ought to demonstrate what he has going on inside.

The Jewish people all believe in common that there is no God but Yahweh. That tenet is fundamental to the Jewish (Christian) system. Returning to his opponents, Jacob intimates that their trust in certain facts from the Torah is all they have -- if their lives don't demonstrate anything. Well, who cares? After all, every spirit being out there realizes those things, and yet they tremble in fear, expecting judgment. The Torah is far more to life than mere intellectual knowledge. Since mere knowledge is useless, and indeed everything that we can do to try to become great is useless, Jacob asks -- not rhetorically this time -- don't you realize that trust is dead without deeds? Can't you see that your own power amounts to nothing: you have to live the life in order to receive mercy. And remember that we'd much rather have God be merciful to us than to judge us as to whether or not we have been perfect.

Wasn't our ancestor Abraham justified through deeds when he brought up Isaak his son to the altar? Do you see that the trust was working together with his deeds, and that the trust was made

complete through the deeds? And the writing was fulfilled which said, "Abraham trusted God, and it was counted for him as justification," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified through deeds and not trust alone.

Some people misread this section, thinking that Jacob was saying that a person's good deeds are more important than his trust. Paulus' letter to the Romans appears to have been written to combat misconceptions that some people had as a result of reading things like what were written in this letter. But notice what this section does say: that God looked at what Abraham had done ("deeds") and observed through those deeds that Abraham indeed trusted him. God noticed an active trust, not a "dead" one. That trust was what justified, but we observe whether or not a person trusts by what he does.

Abraham was "God's friend" -- something that none of the readers nor Jacob's opponents could claim for themselves. Yet even his trust had to be an active one. He practiced his trust, not merely speaking it with his mouth. How do we know Abraham trusted God? The author of Genesis says that we know this through what he did. Therefore, we cannot have trust without deeds. Consequently, justification will not come to those who pretend to have trust without practicing the principle of love.

Now wasn't Rahab the prostitute also justified through deeds in the same way when she received the messengers and sent them out by another road? For just as the body is dead without breath, in the same way also trust is dead without deeds.

Rahab had no deep-rooted knowledge of God's principles, but she realized who God's people were and kept them safe. Was it her knowledge that justified her? No. Then knowledge isn't what justifies. Having and knowing the Hebrew Bible isn't what justifies. The trust that she exhibited when she performed an **act** of trust -- that was what justified her.

The author considers his point well proven -- that one cannot truly have trust in God without living the lifestyle that God wants us to live. For the person who does not practice love and trust, his trust is dead like a corpse.

3:1 *Brothers, not many of you should become teachers, since you know that we will receive a greater judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, this is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also, since we put bits into horses' mouths so that we will persuade them, and we steer their whole bodies. Look: even the ships which are so large and are driven by violent winds are steered wherever the driver wants by a tiny rudder. In the same way, the tongue is also a small member, and it boasts greatly!*

This is a sharp admonition. There is no point in you all becoming teachers, because you who teach such hypocrisy as claiming to love but not caring to help anyone will receive the more critical judgment that comes to teachers. Teachers are judged as to whether or not they are hypocrites.

Still, Jacob acknowledges that it isn't always possible to say the right thing. God understands this, but look at the harm we can do by telling people that they can live their lives without doing what God wants!

As to the power of the tongue, the author becomes quite eloquent on that point. It is like a bit: the mouth steers the whole horse -- the whole person. It is like a rudder, small but able to steer a large ship. The tongue is small, but it "boasts greatly" -- that is, it has great power.

Look at how little fire kindles so much material! And the tongue is a fire, a universe of injustice! The tongue is placed among our members; it blots the whole body, and sets nature's wheel on fire, and is being set on fire by Gehenna.

Just as you can burn so much by starting a small spark, so also the tongue is like a fire. It can cause a whole universe of wrong if it is not kept in check. [And aren't the readers and those with them causing such troubles with their teachings?] By committing a sinful act, part of the body might become "blotted" or "stained." The tongue, Jacob writes, can stain the whole body -- the whole person. The tongue can disrupt the very course of nature. Returning to his "fire" analogy, the tongue is capable of igniting (destroying) the whole way of life, and it itself is sparked by Gehenna -- the place of destruction.

That is, when the tongue is used without care or concern for others, when teachings are spread that are intended to cause rifts between people, to cause the poor to go hungry, and to make others stop loving one another, then it is an instrument of destruction.

For every species of wild animals and also birds, reptiles and also sea creatures, has been subdued and is being subdued by the human species. But the tongue no humans are able to subdue. It is an unstable bad thing full of fatal poison.

In case he might seem to be saying that someone can **completely** tame their tongues, never saying anything bad or unprofitable, he's not saying that! In fact, although people have subdued every species of animal known, they have proven unable to completely tame their tongues. But the implication is that it ought to be tamed enough not to run wild with it, saying worthless things that destroy.

With it we give praises to the Lord (that is, the Father), and with it we curse those people who were made according to God's likeness. From the same mouth, praising and cursing come out. My brothers, these things shouldn't be!

And here's the point: that we can tame our tongues enough not to deliberately harm one another, subverting the teachings about love and trust. After all, as the Torah teaches, we shouldn't be both praising and cursing.

No fountain issues sweet ((fresh)) and bitter water from the same opening. My brothers, a fig tree is not able to make olives, nor a vine to make figs. Neither can a salt spring make sweet water.

Jesus said similar things about not being able to choose two opposite paths. Here, the readers can choose to issue olives or figs, fresh or salt water, but not both. In other words, we can only be on one of two paths: good or evil. True, no one will say everything right 100% of the time, but we can decide to be either a good person who makes mistakes now and then (with his mouth) or someone who enjoys tearing up relationships and doing injustice to the poor. Do the readers want to be uniters or bigots?

Is there anyone wise and established among you? Let him show his deeds of nice conduct in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and bigotry in your hearts, aren't you bragging and lying about the truth? This is not the wisdom that comes down from above. On the contrary, it is earthly, of this life, from spirit beings. For where jealousy and bigotry are there is instability and every foul practice. But the wisdom from above is indeed first pure, then peaceful, gentle, easily persuaded, full of mercy and of good fruits--without discrimination or hypocrisy.

This paragraph is a beautiful and complete condemnation of bigotry in any form. The direct application is clearly to socio-economic bigotry, treating rich people like they are more important than poor people, but the author's words are stated more generally. There is no place for bigotry in the heart of any Christian.

If you have any wisdom at all, he writes, you have to live a life of trust and love. They will be apparent in the conduct of anyone wise. On the other hand, there is absolutely no place for bigotry in the life and attitude of someone who follows Jesus. Anyone who claims otherwise is self-centered. Anyone who claims otherwise is lying about what he knows is true: that we must live by love.

Where does bigotry come from? Not from God but from the basest emotions of this life. Jealousy and bigotry cause chaos, instability. They cause all kinds of foul practices. They are to be avoided like the plague. But as fervently as we avoid bigotry, we need to follow God's wise path of love and trust, which things lead to peace (instead of jealousy) and pure cooperation (instead of bigotry). Love is entirely without discrimination (social, racial, gender, whatever). Love is entirely without the hypocrisy of claiming to love and trust while practicing neither. Love is pure and good.

4:1 *Now the fruit of right is sown in peace by those who make peace. Where do wars and where do fights among you come from? Aren't they from this: from those pleasures of yours that are in combat in your members? You strongly desire, and you don't have. You murder and are jealous, and you are not able to obtain. You fight and you war. Through not asking, you do not have. You ask, and you don't receive because you are asking badly: so that you may waste it on your pleasures.*

Addressing again the ones who caused the strife among Jewish Christians, Jacob states simply that "the fruit" will be found among those who truly follow God. Or, as Jesus put it, "You will know them by their fruits." The classist divisions created by the people whom Jacob addresses are bigoted attempts to discriminate. They are not gestures of peace, which would come from anyone who practiced love and trust.

Where do all those fights come from? Those factions? Not from God but from your own selfish desires. Some people have created a jealousy toward the wealthy and are perpetuating the desire for property and money. But "you strongly desire, and you don't have." Therefore, their lust for money has made them envious. He equates this with murder. You would kill for money, but you still cannot have what you want. What does this cause? Only fighting and war. It doesn't really result in obtaining anything worthwhile.

Instead of praying for what they need, and being at peace, Jacob's opponents are trying to greedily obtain prosperity and happiness. But even on those rare times when they do ask God for help, they are asking greedily and selfishly. God is not going to answer such prayers. So, even after all your effort, Jacob indicates, all you have is strife between fellow Christians.

Adulteresses! Don't you know that the friendship with creation is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wants to be a friend of creation stands as God's enemy. Or do you think that the writing says it worthlessly? Does the spirit that came to dwell in us long to envy? But it gives greater favor! And so it says, "God arranges himself against the high minded ones, but he gives favor to the lowly."

Jesus also said that no one can serve two lords. Here, Jacob refers to their attempt to do so without actually quoting Jesus. In elevating something else to the point where it rivals God for priority in their lives, these people are being adulterous in their relationships with God. Their desire for personal property is standing in the way of that relationship, setting them up as God's enemies. These arrogant people are filling themselves up with the talk about what wonderful lives they lead with more money and property, but God opposes such thought, as the Hebrew Bible clearly indicates. Jacob quotes Prov 3:34, which is a general admonition about thinking too highly of one's self. In quoting the passage, he notes that God's spirit is more generous and great than what life they want to lead, and yet they still neglect the writing.

Therefore, submit to God. But stand against the accuser, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you people with double lives. Be miserable and mourn and cry. Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and joy into sadness. Lower yourself in the Lord's presence, and he will lift you up.

If we recognize that writing, then there can be only one option: to submit to God instead of to greed or Mammon. To turn to a life of love instead of a way of bigotry. Whoever might accuse you, resist such a person. He will have nothing bad to say against you and will flee from your godly example. Don't seek to approach those things that stain the entire body (as he has written earlier), but become clean by approaching God.

"Be miserable" is in opposition to trying to make yourself happy. Instead of seeking to please yourself, be humble (empoverished) in God's presence. Since God favors the humble, and since trying to elevate yourselves amounts to nothing, allow God to elevate you.

11 *Do not speak harshly of one another, brothers. The one who speaks harshly of a brother or judges his brother is speaking harshly of the Torah and judging the Torah. But if you judge the*

Torah, then you are not a doer of the Torah but rather a judge. One is the giver of the Torah and judge--the one who is powerful enough to save and to destroy.

The author's idea of "harsh talking" is that bigoted language that demeans the poor. Speaking of another person in a bigoted fashion not only judges those people but also judges the Torah, for the person so doing places himself above the Torah. Only God is a judge. Only God gave the Torah. The power to save will be exercised upon those who practice love; the power to destroy will be exercised upon those who practice bigotry, worthless conceit, or discrimination.

But who are you who judge your neighbor? Come now, those who are saying, "Today or tomorrow let's go into this city and stay there for a year, and trade, and profit financially." These are ones who don't understand tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a vapor which appears for a short time and disappears. You should say instead, "If the Lord wants it and if we live, then we might also do this or that." But now you are boasting with your displays of pride. All of this boasting is evil. Therefore, it is sin to the one who knows to do a nice thing and is not doing it.

Again, Jacob addresses not all of his readers but those around his readers who were involved in demeaning the poor and pursuing financial gains. These people were so intent, so focused on their business transactions that they failed to realize that in the long run none of those worthless things matter.

For life is like a steam vapor. It is seen for but a brief, fleeting second and then seems to disappear. Planning for so-called prosperity in this life, then, is like failing to plan at all. We ought to be looking at God first, realizing that he has the power to allow us to do or forbid us from doing whatever we might want. We ought to recognize God's power in everything, putting him first and his principles into practice.

Bragging about what power we have because of our property, position, and stature is evil. It is not evil to own property, nor to occupy a place in society, but it is evil to make that a focus of life. Those wealthy Christians who give generously to help the poor are not to blame here. The people who love the poor are loved by God, but those who pursue riches are doing what is evil. They know that God teaches love. They know that Jesus summarized the whole duty of humanity in terms of love. If they don't practice it, then they are doing what is evil.

5:1 *Come now, you wealthy ones! Cry, cry loudly about these miseries of yours that are coming. Your wealth has crumbled, and your clothing has become moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be a testimony about you and will eat your bodies like fire. You have stored up treasures during these last days.*

Instead of leaving behind the mentality present in then-modern Judaism -- the attitude that wealth is a sign of God's approval -- these wealthy people around Jacob's readers were spending all their time trying to become wealthier. In the long run, though, they would have nothing. Instead of realizing that all of Priestly Judaism was about to be wiped out, for even it was only temporary, these people were looking for things that would crumble, decay, and waste away. The analogy is that after the wealthy have died -- possibly during the Revolt against Rome -- the decay of their

property and wealth will testify to everyone remaining that they had wasted their lives on something meaningless and temporary.

Look! The salary of those workers who reaped the fields for you--the salary that you withheld--calls out, and the shouts of the reapers have entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts.

The author insinuates that their greed for money and property not only gave them a bigoted attitude about the poor but also caused them to cheat their workers, paying them less than what their work was worth. God hears the cries of those workers for justice, and in the end, the wealthy people will receive justice.

You lived in luxury on the land, and you were self-indulgent. You nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter! You condemned, you murdered the Just One; isn't he standing against you?

People like this wealthy class were the ones that indulged themselves in luxury, living off the fat of the animals and the work of the people around them. It was exactly that sort of people who refused to listen to Jesus' teachings about trust and love. Those people condemned him to die because they did not want to accept his interpretation of the Torah. These people are, in effect, the same kind of people, and so Jesus stands against them. He was and is "the Just One" -- the one who had done no wrong. The wealthy class judged him falsely, but he stands up to testify against them truly.

7 Therefore, suffer long, brothers, until the time of the Lord's presence. Look, the gardener is looking out toward the honorable fruit of the land, suffering long over it until he receives early and later harvests. You suffer long also. Steady your hearts, because the time of the Lord's presence has neared.

At last, Jacob returns to addressing his original readers, the intended recipients of the letter. These were his brothers and sisters in the faith of Anointed Jesus, who were suffering trials on account of certain wealthy people. The two harvests of the year here signify the total of all the fruit. Just as a gardener waits patiently until the last fruit of the second harvest comes, to reap the most benefit, the readers should wait patiently until the return of Jesus in judgment on Israel.

As Israel was judged, and many people died, this stood as proof that their way of life was not supported by Yahweh God, who sought that his people acknowledge Jesus as the Anointed One and put into practice the principles of trust and love.

Brothers, don't gripe against one another, so that you may not be judged. Look, the judge has been standing in front of the doors.

The time is coming soon for the judgment on Israel, as analogized by the courtroom image of the judge waiting at the door for the litigants to arrive. Instead of looking in the direction of the wealthy people and passing judgment on the poor, the readers needed to quit griping and stand together, for a time of strife was coming soon.

Brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name as an example of suffering bad things and of longsuffering. Look: we bless those who are patient. You have heard of Job's patience, and you saw the Lord's aim (that the Lord is richly compassionate and shows mercy).

What attitude should Jacob's readers have as they try to wait patiently for an end to the strife caused by the wealthy? First of all, there would be more suffering. The readers were instructed, then, to return to the Biblical examples before them. As mentioned earlier, they were familiar with Job's example of patience. "Yahweh gives, and Yahweh takes away. Blessed is the name of Yahweh." The readers should have that attitude, knowing that God's purpose and plan call for him to be compassionate and merciful toward his people -- the ones who follow his principles.

Now, before all things, my brothers, "do not swear. Neither by heaven... nor the earth..." nor any other oath. But "let it be to you that the yes is yes and the no is no," so that you may not fall under judgment.

And so, Jacob applies the sayings of Jesus, as the Anointed One had applied the Torah. The readers should not take any kind of oaths about life, but they ought to keep their word, doing whatever they say they will do. The Torah had been interpreted to say that it was necessary to keep one's word when making an oath. Jesus replied by saying that everything one says should be true; therefore, there is no need for taking oaths. Be truthful in all things, and escape judgment.

13 *Anyone among you who is suffering misfortune should pray. Anyone who is cheerful should play music. Anyone among you who is sick should call the elderly people of the assembly to him, and they should pray over him after anointing him with oil in the Lord's name. And the vow made in trust will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him, and if he did any sins they will be forgiven him.*

Jacob's focus here is on the life of "the sharing" that is mentioned in Acts 2 and 4 and which some of the people were considering abandoning. Even more so, the people needed to bond together. Whoever is misfortunate should pray, but the context appears to place the people in their relationships at the time. That is, they should pray in the presence of their friends. Those who are happy should rejoice by playing music -- again together. Whoever is sick should call for assistance. Those who had been involved with God the longest -- the elderly -- would have a more powerful effect in helping combat the illness. Oil was often used medicinally (as in the parable of the "Good Samaritan"), and so if oil could be used -- or any other measures taken, the people ought to do these things for one another. As everyone focused on assisting one another, God would hear their prayers. If it had been sin that had resulted in illness, God was eager to forgive the person's misdeeds.

So admit your sins to one another, and make vows on one another's behalf, so that you may be healed. In operation, a just person's supplication succeeds greatly. Elijah was a human being, suffering in similar ways to us, and he prayed a prayer for it not to rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And again he prayed, and the sky gave rain, and the land provided its fruit.

The context remains that of their loving and trusting relationships. Christian friends ought to admit their faults to one another, thereby providing the means for other people to help them. God would hear the prayers of just people on behalf of the friend whom they loved. In fact, we ought to pray like Elijah did -- knowing that even something as impossible as causing drought and rain is possible when God is the focus of our lives. In particular, God would help provide a means for the wanderer to return from his sin. The shortness of time until the destruction of the Temple necessitated urgency, in case such a person would be tempted to return to ritual religion.

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and if someone turns him back, he should know that the one who has turned a sinner back out of his wandering way will save his soul from death and "will hide a multitude of sins."

It is the way of sharing, the life of trust and love which not only helps others find the right path in life, but also God looks favorably on people who are so focused on loving others. God will be more generous toward the person who shows love for his fellow Christians.

This is the note upon which to end. The author has attacked those wealthy people who sought to turn his people to the bigotry that they harbored in their hearts. He has demonstrated that the pursuit of wealth amounts to nothing. With the readers realizing that Jesus taught them not to seek wealth in this life but to pursue and practice love and trust, Jacob concludes by describing what life **can** be like (as Priestly Judaism comes to an end) when Christian relationships are the central element of that life. It is an abrupt farewell, but it serves as a reminder (Pv 10:12) that God's way of love is infinitely superior to the human way of selfish hatred and bigotry.