

The Complete Person: Maturity and Integrity According to James 3XJ3/5XJ5

McMaster Divinity College
Dr. Christopher D. Land
landc@mcmaster.ca

Winter 2020
Monday 11:00am–12:50pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Martin Luther is infamous for calling the Epistle of James “a right strawy epistle,” but most Christians ignore Luther’s straw man and embrace the Epistle as compelling and perennially relevant. Indeed, people often memorize and cherish the words of James, finding in them a practical yet radical ethic that is akin to Jesus’s teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. In this course, we will explore James’s teachings and reflect upon their relevance for life in the twenty-first century. In particular, we will explore the emphasis that James places on maturity and integrity as hallmarks of the human life lived well. We will also discuss the role that James the Just played in early Judaism and in the early Christian movement.

Students wanting to take this course with the language option (i.e. Greek Exegesis) should email the professor in order to request the NT 2XJ3 syllabus.

MA/PhD students wanting to take this course as a New Testament seminar should email the professor in order to obtain the NT 6XJ6 syllabus.

SPECIALIZATIONS

Students taking this as a Biblical Studies (BS) course will be encouraged to explore the historical and cultural setting of the Epistle, as well as scholarly debates concerning the interpretation of its contents.

Students taking this as a Pastoral Studies (PS) course will be encouraged to explore how the message of the Epistle is relevant for Christian faith and practice in the 21st century, with a special emphasis placed upon the matters of spiritual maturity and ethical integrity.

Doctor of Practical Theology students who wish to apply for this course as an Advanced Elective for their degree program must consult with the Program Director of the DPT and the course instructor in order to develop an Advanced Elective approach to the course that fulfills the specific elements required by the DPT program. Once the elements of the Advanced Elective have been agreed upon by the student, the Program Director, and the instructor, a formal application can be made for an Advanced Elective in connection with this course. Once the

application is accepted, DPT students can proceed with the course as part of their degree program.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Having completed this course successfully, students should:

Knowing

- Remember the structure and content of the Epistle of James;
- Be familiar with introductory issues and scholarly debates concerning the Epistle;
- Understand the major theological and ethical teachings found in the Epistle;
- Be more familiar with the Greek of the NT (NT 2XJ3 and 6XJ6 only).

Being

- Appreciate the importance of participating in critical and respectful discussions concerning biblical texts;
- Be sensitive to the historical and cultural environment in which the early church first communicated the gospel;
- Embody the ethical seriousness that is so evident throughout the Epistle of James;
- Be cautious interpreters of Greek texts (NT 2XJ3 and 6XJ6 only).

Doing

- Be able to read and understand books that engage with James in a critical manner;
- Be able to talk intelligently about James;
- Be able to explain and demonstrate how James is relevant to contemporary Christianity;
- Be cultivating habits of life that are consistent with the teachings of James;
- Be able to examine the Epistle of James in its original Greek (NT 2XJ3 and 6XJ6 only).

COURSE PREREQUISITES

Prerequisites for NT 2XJ3: a minimum of two semesters in Greek language study.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Note: Students are required to complete all of the following assignments. No unfinished assignments are permitted. *Each written assignment should be uploaded in Microsoft Word format to Avenue to Learn. A penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments. Assignments cannot be submitted after April 8th without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (thomn@mcmaster.ca).*

Initial Orientation (10%)

During the first week of class, you will read three brief journal articles (made available on A2L) that discuss how particular communities have approached the interpretation of the Epistle of James. These articles will help you to reflect thoughtfully on your own situatedness as a reader of the Bible. Having read them, you will next read through the entire Epistle of James. Finally, you will spend some time reflecting on yourself as a reader, identifying factors that (consciously or unconsciously) affect your interaction with the Epistle. Examples might include the influence of your ecclesial tradition, your past history of reading or studying the letter, your socio-economic status, specific theological commitments that have bearing on key passages, etc. The outcome of the exercise will be a 500-word reflection essay in which you introduce yourself to the class as a reader of the Bible and as a participant in class discussions. The initial orientation must be posted to A2L before **11:00am on January 13th**, by which time you will also need to have reported your reading of the assigned articles (see below).

Secondary Reading and Class Discussions (15% + 15% = 30% total)

Prior to each class session (i.e. **each week before 11:00am**), you must report your completion (or non-completion) of some assigned readings that discuss the Epistle of James (see the schedule below; the McKnight commentary should be purchased, but the other readings will be made available on A2L). These readings are essential to the class, not only because they will stimulate you to think more carefully about James but also because they will form the basis for in-class discussions. Each week, I will provide an initial lecture that draws out and clarifies specific interpretive issues raised by the assigned readings. You will then consider your own response to these issues by discussing them with a few fellow students. Following your small group discussion, a representative of your group will offer a brief report to the class, outlining general areas of consensus, specific points of disagreement, and important outstanding questions. NB: Students are expected to attend class and to participate in both small-group and whole-class discussions. If a student consistently fails to attend class, he or she will not be eligible for a passing grade in the course.

Informed Re-Orientation (40% for BS students; 20% for PS students)

At the midway point of the semester, you will write a well-researched essay in which you introduce the Epistle of James as both an ancient letter and a work of sacred scripture. You should write as though you are introducing the text to an uninformed reader who wishes to understand both where the letter came from and why it is still regarded as important and transformative by contemporary readers. The essay should be well-documented and should properly cite not only the assigned readings but also other scholarly publications (such as academic commentaries on the Epistle, general reference works such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, or NT introductions, and peer-reviewed journal articles). It must articulate your own views while demonstrating awareness of scholarly debates. Major introductory issues for discussion include authorship, audience, date, and provenance (each of which can be implied and/or actual), as well as the genre/function of the text and its main themes/theology (i.e.

relationship to ideas or practices advocated in other Jewish and Greco-Roman writings). Your discussion of James as sacred scripture should build an intelligent case for the ongoing relevance of the letter to a specific twenty-first century community (of your own choosing), with explicit discussion of specific factors that might be seen to complicate or problematize the ongoing relevance of the letter for that particular community (e.g. delay of the Parousia, Christian anti-Judaism, non-Jewish and non-Torah-observant readers, metaphysical naturalism, socio-economic status, etc.). The essay must be 3,000 words in length and must be uploaded to A2L before **11:00am on February 24th**.

Intentional Disorientation (20% for BS students; 40% for PS students)

During the second half of the course, you will once again read the Epistle of James together with a recent commentary on the text (i.e. McKnight) while we work our way through the letter as a class. Drawing upon this engagement with the letter, you must produce five (5) thoughtful provocations of approximately 400 words each (one might say, “devotions,” except that this perhaps assumes too narrow an audience) in which you cite the Epistle of James and then extend to your reader a similarly prophetic comfort or critique. Your provocations must leverage the things that you have already learned in the course, so that they move beyond thoughtless repetition of James and towards a thoughtful consideration of what God is saying today in and through this ancient letter. Each application of James’s words should disrupt some (conscious or unconscious) belief or habit that characterizes some particular Christian group, but the details are entirely yours to choose. I am looking especially for penetrating “readings” of James and of contemporary Christianity, of the sort that might enable us to see ourselves and our circumstances in a new light. The provocations will be individually posted to A2L according to the schedule below (i.e. **before 11:00am each week beginning on March 9th**). The posts will be visible to the entire class, and we will have a concluding class discussion on April 6th in which we explore the various provocations and discuss both the witness of James and its formative role in the church today.

GRADING SUMMARY

	(BS)	(PS)
Initial Orientation	10%	10%
Secondary Reading	15%	15%
Participation in Discussions	15%	15%
Informed Re-Orientation	40%	20%
<u>Intentional Disorientation</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>40%</u>
Total	100%	100%

TEXTBOOKS

All students are required to possess an English translation of the New Testament, as well as:

McKnight, Scot. *The Letter of James*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

Note: Additional electronic readings will be made available through Avenue to Learn (A2L).

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College’s book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, ON, M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Dates	Reading (due @ 11am)	Written Assignments (due @ 11am)	Seminar Sessions
Jan 6			Who Reads James?
Jan 13	George (2000) Allison (2014) Bauckham (1999)	Orientation	James the Just
Jan 20	Hartin (2005) Tiller (2005)		James and Judaism
Jan 27	McKnight (1999) Bauckham (2001)		James and Jesus
Feb 3	Painter (2005)		James and “Christianity”
Feb 10	Allison (2001) Land (2019)		The Epistle of James
Feb 17	Smith (2016)		Thanksgiving (No Class)
Feb 24	McKnight (pp. 1–58)	Re-Orientation	Who Are the Faithful?
Mar 2	Jas 1:2–15 McKnight (pp. 59–122)		Suffering and Trust
Mar 9	Jas 1:16–2:26 McKnight (pp. 122–263)	Provocation #1	Mercy and Torah
Mar 16	Jas 3:1–4:12 McKnight (pp. 264–366)	Provocation #2	Maturity and Integrity
Mar 23	Jas 4:13–5:12 McKnight (pp. 366–429)	Provocation #3	Wealth and Justice
Mar 30	Jas 5:13–20 McKnight (pp. 430–461)	Provocation #4	Healing and Community
Apr 6		Provocation #5	Who Will Speak Today?

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty at:

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) for plagiarism detection and the student's continuation in the course represents his or her consent to the use of this service. If a student has objections to the use of this service, alternate arrangements for assignment submission must be made with the professor in advance of the assignment deadlines.

A useful guide to avoiding plagiarism is the Harvard Guide to Using Sources:

<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do>

STYLE

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the latest edition of the McMaster Divinity College *Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses*, which is available on the MDC website.

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.