



McMaster Divinity
College

JAMES

NT 3XJ3 (BS/PS)

McMaster Divinity College
Dr. Christopher D. Land
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Winter 2023
Monday 4:00–5:50pm

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. 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.

SPECIALIZATIONS

NT 3XJ3 is available as a Biblical Studies (BS) or Pastoral Studies (PS) specialization.

≈ Students taking 3XJ3 as a Biblical Studies (BS) course will be encouraged to explore the historical and cultural settings of the Epistle, as well as recent discussions surrounding the interpretation of its contents.

≈ Students taking 3XJ3 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.

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;

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;

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.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Note: Students are required to complete all of the following assignments. No unfinished assignments are permitted. *Written assignments must be uploaded to Avenue to Learn either as Word documents (.doc, .docx) or in Rich Text Format (.rtf). A penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments. Assignments cannot be submitted after April 6th without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (strickpd@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. This initial orientation must be uploaded to A2L by **11:59pm on January 16th**, by which time you will also need to have reported your reading of the assigned articles (see below).

SECONDARY READINGS (15%) AND CLASS DISCUSSIONS (15%)

Prior to each class session (i.e. **each week before 4:00pm**), 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 of our in-class discussions. 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 **11:59pm on February 27th**.

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 must be uploaded to A2L according to the schedule below (i.e. **before 11:59pm each week beginning on March 6th**).

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

Students are required to possess the following:

An English translation of the New Testament;

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

Additional electronic readings made freely available through Avenue to Learn (A2L).

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the MDC chapel entrance. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, ON, M9A 3C3: phone 416.620.2934; mobile 416.668.3434; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

MEETING SCHEDULE

Meeting Date	Preparation (Due at Meeting Time)	Lecture Topics	Written Assignments (Due @ 11:59pm)
Jan 9	Course Syllabus	Introduction to the Course Who Reads James?	
Jan 16	George (2000) Allison (2014) Bauckham (1999) Jas 1:1–5:20	James the Just	Orientation
Jan 23	Hartin (2005) Tiller (2005)	James and Judaism	
Jan 30	McKnight (1999) Bauckham (2001)	James and Jesus	
Feb 6	Painter (2005)	James and “Christianity”	
Feb 13	Allison (2001) Land (2019)	The Epistle of James	
Feb 20	Smith (2016)	Family Day (No Class)	Re-Orientation
Feb 27	McKnight (pp. 1–58)	Intensive Hybrid Week (No Class)	
Mar 6	Jas 1:2–15 McKnight (pp. 59–122)	Suffering and Trust	Provocation #1
Mar 13	Jas 1:16–2:26 McKnight (pp. 122–263)	Mercy and Torah	Provocation #2
Mar 20	Jas 3:1–4:12 McKnight (pp. 264–366)	Maturity and Integrity	Provocation #3

Mar 27	Jas 4:13–5:12 McKnight (pp. 366–429)	Wealth and Justice	Provocation #4
Apr 3	Jas 5:13–20 McKnight (pp. 430–461)	Healing and Community	Provocation #5

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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 McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses:

<https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>

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 for information only and remains the property of the respective professor. This syllabus is prepared with the best information available, but the professor reserves the right to change the content and format of the course.