Hebrews, James

In several places we actually have an excursus on the Covenant where I touch on a theme that's important for that book, and one that has roots in the Old Testament. So we talk a little bit about that and then we move on to the next book, which is James.

Alright, let's open in prayer. Father, we thank you for this day and for the new week and as the end of the semester draws closer we ask for your enablement and help to make it to that point and finish everything that we need to. Father, I pray now that we’ll be able to think clearly and critically, but also spiritually about what is nothing less than your very revelation to us. As we think about just one part of that, help us to be able to understand what you intended to communicate to your first reader so that we might be prepared to bridge that gap to understand how your work continues to address us as your people today. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

The new covenant, I suggested to you last class period, actually the theme of covenant begins all the way back in creation in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. God's relationship with Adam and Eve is predicated upon a covenant that he establishes with them, and subsequently the rest of the Old Testament, in a sense, is structured around a series of covenants that God establishes with his people as he attempts to restore his relationship that began in creation, but was thwarted because of sin. The Old Testament ends with God anticipating through the prophets that he will one day establish a new covenant relationship that will structure and determine his relationship with his people. That covenant relationship is indicated in a number of Old Testament texts. For example, Jeremiah chapter 31, that actually gets quoted in the book of Hebrews that we just got done looking at, where the author is clear that the new covenant that God promised in Jeremiah 31 now gets inaugurated and fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Other prophetic texts, even those that don't use the term “covenant” or “new covenant,” also anticipate the
establishment of a new covenant relationship that will restore God's intention for his creation and his intention for establishing a relationship with his people where he will dwell with them once again. They will be his people and he will be their God. Ezekiel chapter 37, although it does not use the term “covenant,” clearly implies and anticipates the establishment of the God’s covenant relationship with his people and has all the elements of a covenant relationship. This is chapter 36 and the God speaking through his prophet to his people and anticipating a day when God will restore his people to a relationship with himself. He begins by saying “I will take you from the nations [referring to Israel] and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you and I you will be clean from all your uncleanliness and from all your idols. I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you. A new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe the ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors and you shall be my people and I will be your God. I will save you from your uncleanliness I will side,” etc. etc. So this is Ezekiel's version of the new covenant.

Why a new covenant? What is so new about the new covenant in comparison to the previous covenant relationships God had established with his people? First of all, God promises a new relationship with his people. No longer will knowledge of God be mediated and this is especially clear in Jeremiah chapter 31. No longer will a knowledge of God be mediated or God's presence be mediated, but now it will be directly experienced by God's people. Second, is the complete forgiveness of sins. You notice that language even in Ezekiel of God giving them a clean heart and God cleansing them and forgiving them from their uncleanness and their idolatry, the very things that got the nation of Israel into exile in the first place. God will now completely deal with sin. It’s not that the old covenant relationship did not deal with sin, but now a God anticipates an ultimate final cleansing that he will enact by instituting this new covenant, so a complete forgiveness of sins. Finally, the ability to obey God's law. God says, “I will put my Spirit within you. I will enable you,
or cause you, to keep my decrees and my commandment.” With the new covenant, God himself will provide the enablement and the motivation for his people to keep his commandments. As opposed to the first covenant where Israel disobeyed which sent them into exile. These things seem to be at the heart of what is new with the establishment of this new covenant that we read about in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

One important thing to remember, when we get to the New Testament all of the blessings and benefits of salvation that God's people enjoy are inextricably tied to the new covenant. As I said before, whenever the New Testament authors refer to the Holy Spirit and talk about the Holy Spirit, that is part of the new covenant. In Ezekiel chapter 36, God promises he will pour out his Spirit on his people. He will give them his Spirit. When we think about the language that we read in the New Testament and how we talk today, we talk about being filled with the Spirit or receiving the Spirit. Paul uses of the language being tied with the Spirit or being sealed with the Spirit, all of that goes back to the new covenant. The presence of the Holy Spirit with his people, the reception of the Holy Spirit by God's people, the church, today, is tied to the new covenant. Obedience to Christ. When we talk about salvation or being justified by faith, all the language that we use is found in the Old Testament referring to the blessings of salvation that we participate in. These are all linked to the new covenant salvation. In other words, we do not enjoy the blessings of salvation apart from the new covenant that Jesus Christ has now inaugurated. That's very important to remember. When we talk about salvation, justification, redemption, receiving the Spirit, obedience to Christ, all that language we use in the New Testament goes back to and is tied into the fulfillment of the new covenant. There is no salvation apart from the inauguration and the fulfillment of the covenant promise, that God makes to its people under the new covenant.

The new covenant also participates in the “already, but not yet” structure that we've seen in the New Testament. Going back to the “kingdom of God” in the gospel of Matthew, we talked a little bit about the theme of kingdom. The future kingdom when God would invade history and his reign would defeat the power of evil and where God's sovereignty
would be fully acknowledged and his rule would extend over all the earth. Jesus Christ already inaugurates that kingdom so that men and women can experience God's rule and enter into God’s rule already; yet, there's a “not yet” aspect. The kingdom has not yet arrived in its fullness. The kingdom of God has not yet arrived in full force to completely wipe out the powers of evil and that which opposes God's kingdom. God's kingdom is already present, so Jesus can say “if I cast out demons by the power of Satan, God's kingdom is upon you.” Yet, he can still talk as if the kingdom is something yet future. It's both. God's kingdom has already arrived and been inaugurated; yet, it is not yet come in its fullness. The new creation is already present. Paul can say: If anyone is in Christ that person is part of the new creation; yet, the new creation has not yet fully arrived. The same is true of covenant. The new covenant has already been inaugurated; yet, it has yet to be inaugurated in all its fullness in the future.

For example, in Hebrews chapter 8, we find the already aspect of the new covenant. The author of Hebrews is convinced that Jesus Christ has already inaugurated this new covenant that brings a new immediate relationship to God. A covenant that deals completely with sins and completely forgives sins. A covenant that now brings the Holy Spirit and inability to obey God's law. That covenant has now been inaugurated through the coming of Jesus Christ. However, if I can skip to the very end of the New Testament, in Revelation chapter 21 and verse 3, which is part of an elaborate vision, we’ll hopefully have time to talk more about that at the end of the semester. In chapter 21 and verse 3, I want you to notice the covenant language. In fact, this language comes right out of Ezekiel 37, the section we have just been reading from. The author says: “I heard a loud voice from the throne [this is John's vision of the ‘not yet.’ It is now the eschaton has arrived] see the dwelling of God is with human beings. He will dwell with them. They will be his people and he will be their God. God himself will be with them.”

That is the language of covenant. They will be his people and he will be their God. John sees fulfillment in the book of Revelation. The new covenant, like most of the other blessings of salvation, participate in this “already but not yet” structure. They've already
been inaugurated with the first coming of Christ, in advance of the final fulfillment and the final manifestation in the ultimate new creation. That's why you'll find language like Paul saying that the Holy Spirit is a “down payment” of our final redemption. That's the “already but not yet” structure. We already experience all the blessings of the new covenant to which all the blessings of salvation are tied, because it’s already been inaugurated in Christ. Yet, that is only a down payment of and in anticipation of its final fulfillment that is yet to come.

To take another excursus, I haven't been a real big one for you learning a lot of dates. At least in the New Testament, because most of the events occur in a 40 to 60 year period. The events go back much earlier, starting with the birth of Christ. I haven’t had you memorize a lot of dates, because if you just guess first century you'd be right on just about everything. At times, we need to be more precise. There's one date that you do need to know and that is 70 A.D. or 70 C.E. Common Era. Anyone know why I mentioned that date? The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem which occurred in 70 A.D. Back in 63 B.C., Rome became a power and subjugated Jerusalem and all of Judea, once again under foreign influence, after Israel enjoyed a very brief time of independence. Now things finally come to a head and in 70 A.D. or 70 C.E. Jerusalem is once again destroyed and Rome goes in and sacks the city. It was a climax, a turning point in Israel's history literally, as well. I do want you to recognize that date. For example, the book of Hebrews is a book that, because there's no mention of the Temple, the author is interested in God's dwelling and in sacrifice and in the high priesthood, but there seems to be little mention of the Temple. Instead, the author focuses more on the tabernacle that accompanied Israel's wandering through the wilderness on their way to the promised land. Some suggested because of the lack of a reference to the Temple that perhaps Hebrews was written during or before it was destroyed. In other words, the assumption is any New Testament document that doesn't mention such a significant event like the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. must have been written before, because certainly anyone living or writing shortly after that would've mentioned an event like the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Some use that
event to date certain documents as to whether they seem to be aware of the destruction of Jerusalem. I want you to keep that date. You need to know that again because historically, religiously, and literarily, 70 A.D. was a crucial turning point in the history of Jerusalem and of God's people. However, I suggested that the main reason Hebrews does not refer to the Temple is not because it had been destroyed, it could have been. The main reason he refers the tabernacle is because he's using the wilderness generation as his primary model. So that's up one date that I do want you to be aware of: 70 A.D. or 70 C.E., the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Let's open up another piece of the early church's mail. The book of James is unique in a number of ways. First of all, although we realize the value of the book of James and we’re familiar with it, when you stop and think about it, when was the last time you heard a sermon or a series of sermon preached on the book of James? We’ll see why that might be the case, but the first thing to do when we look at the book of James and is to ask what we should do with it is to ask what the church has done with it.

One of the watersheds for the way that the book of James has been treated goes back to Martin Luther's treatment of the book of James. If you remember when we looked at Martin Luther in relationship to Galatians and Romans, Luther was so focused on the teaching in Galatians and Romans that the justification came only by God's grace through faith and had nothing to do with human ability, because humans are so sinful we cannot hope to earn God's favor. We cannot stand before a holy God by relying on our good works. The only option is to trust in God's grace and rely on God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Having emphasized that, you can almost imagine what Martin Luther would think when he got to the book of James. When he looked at the James and read this passage, this is James chapter 2. He says: you see that faith was active along with works and faith was brought to completion by works. Thus the Scripture said, “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness and Abraham was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by his faith alone.” You can imagine Luther's response or his thoughts while reading a text like that. Understandably, in light of his
emphasis on Romans and on the Pauline teaching of justification by faith alone, apart from any works that one can do, you can imagine Luther's response when he gets to James and reads that we’re justified not by faith alone but by works also. Luther questioned the value of James as belonging to the New Testament because it seemed on the surface of things to conflict with Paul's teaching that justification is only by grace through faith. Now James says, justification is by works and not by faith alone. We’ll talk about that later as to how James and Paul might relate to each other, but I would suggest that it is in some sense, Luther's legacy has continued on today. If you hear anything about James it's usually going to be confined to chapter 1, where James talks about patience and limits and endurance in the midst of trials. That's a biblical theme that we’re all aware of and sounds good and something we need to hear. But James has other things, like the text we just read that you’re justified by works and not by faith alone, or later on, to say the prayer of faith heals someone. If you're sick, call the elders to pray and when they pray you will be healed. James says not many of you should consider being teachers because you will be subject to a stricter judgment. What do we make of statements like that?

You can understand while James would get our vote: yes, that's a book that should be in the New Testament, most of the time we probably ignore it and we retreat to the safer ground of Paul's letters. Nothing against Paul, but often Paul's teaching becomes a filter through which we measure everything else. Interestingly, and this is true not only living in the light of the legacy of Martin Luther, but even in the order in which our New Testament appears. After the Gospels, which tells all the stories about Jesus and then Acts, most of the documents that we encounter, the largest number of documents we encounter, come from Paul's pen. It's not until after you have been steeped in Paul that you finally get to Hebrews, James, and so on. It’s almost like you’re set up by the way the New Testament is arranged for reading James or other books, in light of what you know about Paul. In light of Martin Luther, we have been taught to read the New Testament that way. Whether we realize it or not, Paul’s letters become the litmus test, or a lens, through which we read the rest of the New Testament. It’s interesting though, that some of our early fourth century or fifth
century manuscripts of the New Testament that include the entirety the New Testament, some of them actually have James coming before Paul's letters. It would be interesting to see what it would be like to read the New Testament and read Paul's letters after having read James, rather than the other way around. It seems like we become so familiar with and use the Paul's letters that when we get to James we’re either not sure what to do with it, or we quickly try to conform it to sound like what we’re used to from reading Paul's letters. We’ll look at how we relate James’s teaching and Paul's teaching.

Before we do that, let's talk a little bit about the letter itself and why it’s important, who wrote it, why it was written and what it’s doing? There are at least three possibilities from the New Testament. There are at least three possible candidates for the authorship of James. Two James we know about were Jesus’s apostles. A third James that we know about from the book of Acts was Jesus’s brother who was also known as the leader of the Jerusalem church. You read about him in Acts 12, Acts 15, and maybe one or two other places in Acts. Church history has been overwhelmingly in favor of assigning the authorship of this book to James, the brother of Jesus, and for good reason. James being both one of Jesus’s relatives, Jesus’s brother, and on top of that being a leader in the Jerusalem church would make a letter from him a prime candidate for being considered as New Testament Scripture and being included in the canon of the New Testament. I'm not going to provide argumentation or anything, but simply assume that most likely the James that is referred to in the first verse of this book was Jesus’s brother and who in the first century became the leader of the Jerusalem church as we read about in the book of Acts.

Who are the readers of James? Here you can see why James is included in the collection of letters, along with Hebrews as one of the general epistles, because James too, seems to have a fairly wide audience. It begins, “James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” It begins like a typical first century letter, but then it says “to the 12 tribes in the dispersion, greetings.” The key is understanding who the 12 tribes are, because there there's no specific references to the readership throughout the rest of the letter. So who are the 12 tribes? Some have suggested that we take this reference more metaphorically. That
is, in the same way that the New Testament uses language referring to Israel in the Old Testament to refer to the church. You find that in a number of books. For example, we already saw that Paul labeled anyone who is in Christ as the seed of Abraham. He's taken language referred to physical Israel in the Old Testament and now applies it through Jesus Christ to the church. Some have suggested that is true here. The reference to the 12 tribes from the dispersion is a reference metaphorically to the church, to all of God's people who through Christ are now the new Israel. The other option, which is probably more likely, is that this is a physical or literal reference to Jewish Christians who are actually dispersed or spread out or removed from their homeland, which is Jerusalem. James then, is addressing Jewish Christians who physically are separate from and removed from Jerusalem, from the homeland. They are dispersed or in a sense, exiled from their homeland over a certain geographical area. James sends a letter that will generally address this group.

There's one thing that we can know about this group for sure. Due to the number of references to poverty and wealth throughout James, most likely James is addressing a socio-economic system where many of his readers find themselves in situations of poverty, even to the extent of being taken advantage of by rich landowners, for example. So in addition to being ethnically Jews who are spread out and separate from their homeland, Jerusalem, many of them exist in situations of extreme poverty where they are subject to mistreatment at the hands of wealthy owners, wealthy landowners and wealthy masters. You'll see that in a number of references.

For example, chapter 1, unfortunately these references usually get overshadowed by the debate as to whether James agrees with Paul, when Paul says you're justified by works and not by faith. What we miss is that it is addressing the context of treatment of the poor and those in the situation of poverty. For example, at the end of chapter 1 James says, “If anyone thinks they are religious and they do not bridle their tongues, but deceived their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” Notice that the emphasis on caring for those who are impoverished and those
who are underrepresented.

In chapter 2 before James gets into this discussion of faith and works and faith apart from works is dead and you're justified not by faith alone but by works. Before he ever says that, James introduces that by saying this: “What good is it my brothers and sisters if you say you have faith but you do not have works. Can that faith save you? If a brother or sister lacks clothes and lacks daily food and someone says of them ‘go in peace be warm and eat your fill’ but you do not supply their bodily needs what is that?” James brings up this theme of riches and poverty over and over, as if at least some of his readers exist in a situation of extreme poverty and are even being taken advantage by the rich. Perhaps against some of his readers are not paying close enough attention to those who are in situations of extreme poverty.

One other thing about James, “a letter from Jerusalem to the dispersion.” When you ask what kind of letter James might be besides just the first century letter which it is, it begins and ends just like a letter although it doesn't quite develop like some of Paul's letters that we’re used to. Some have suggested James may resemble what is known as “a letter to the dispersion.” We do have some examples; although they're embedded in larger works, of a leader in Jerusalem sending out a letter to Jews are who are dispersed. An official leader of the Jews and in Jerusalem is now writing a letter, an authoritative letter, to address and to be read by those living outside of the city of Jerusalem. Some have suggested that James follows that pattern. That James is a letter to the dispersion. James being an authoritative leader in the Jerusalem church is now writing a letter to the dispersed Jews. That certainly fits verse one, where James identifies himself as a servant of Jesus Christ now writing to the 12 tribes who are dispersed. For that reason, some have suggested James is following what can be labeled a “letter to the dispersion,” following this idea about a Jewish leader in a position of authority a writing to those separate from Jerusalem, perhaps experiencing the pain and difficulty being separated from the homeland, of being separated from the center of their religion, the center of God's dwelling place and his blessing upon his people. That's possible, but I don't know. It is hard to determine if that was really an
 unofficial letter form or a form of a letter that the readers would've identified with and would've understood to exist, or not. That's certainly a possibility, but at the very least James is following fairly typical conventions of writing a first century letter.

One other thing we know about James is that his letter actually resembles Old Testament and Jewish proverbial literature or wisdom literature such as one finds in Proverbs. Some of James and some of the verses in James are specific statements in James have a proverbial type quality in form. One person, although I think they’re wrong, even once described James as a string with a bunch of pearls strung together. It almost feels like Proverbs, where the author is jumping around in different topics. Some suggested that James is doing that, just like you're jumping from one wisdom topic to another. More importantly, many of the themes that James raises are things you find in Proverbs and other wisdom literature, such as James’s instruction on being careful of one’s speech, his instructions on anger, his instructions on poverty and wealth, and many others. All of those are themes that emerge in a book like Proverbs or Jewish wisdom literature. A fairly common view is that James closely resembles Old Testament wisdom or Jewish wisdom type of literature; although that's not the only thing it resembles, but certainly it has a lot of similarities in its teaching and some of the themes and the way it expresses them as you find in the Jewish wisdom type literature.

In light of all this, what is the purpose of James? James writes to encourage Christians to live out their faith wisely in the world. To add a little bit more detail, James is addressing Jewish Christians who are scattered and separate from their homeland, Jerusalem. James writes to instruct them and encourage them to live out their faith wisely, to bring in the wisdom idea, in the world.

Now to how James is put together the plan of James, and how James may be structured or arranged. I'm not interested in giving you some elaborate outline or anything, but I've listed three themes or ideas. The first one is the theme of testing or endurance, that is being tested and enduring through trials. The other one is poverty and generosity. James addresses of the issue poverty and wealth, but in doing so encourages generosity. Finally,
he addresses the theme of wisdom and speech. Again, all themes that you find cropping up in a book like Proverbs. Interestingly, what James does in the very first chapter the very first eight to ten verses or so, James will introduce all three of these themes and then what he'll do throughout the rest of the book is keep revisiting those three themes. The same three themes are introduced in chapter 1 and keep reoccurring. James picks them up two or three more times throughout the book and expands on them at length.

For example, listen to the first chapter and see if you can identify all three of these from your notes: testing and endurance in the midst of trials, poverty and generosity the theme of poverty and riches, and then the last one being wisdom and speech. After his introduction, “James a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ in the 12 tribes in the dispersion, greetings my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of any kind consider it not nothing but joy because you know the testing of your faith produces endurance and let endurance have its full effect so that you may be mature and complete and lacking in nothing.” Do you see the theme of testing and endurance in the midst of trials? “Now if any of you is lacking wisdom you should ask from God who gives all generously and unbegrudgingly and it will be given you, but ask in faith and not doubting. For the one who doubts is like the wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For the doubter, double minded is unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.” Did you catch the theme of wisdom and speech, especially speech in terms of prayer? Finally, verses 9 and 10, “let the believer [the Christian] who is lowly, boast in being exalted, and let the rich boast in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field. Its flower falls and its beauty perishes. In the same way, will be the rich. In the midst of a busy life, they will wither away.” All three themes, testing and endurance, wisdom and speech, and then also poverty, wealth, and generosity, will get revisited two or three more times throughout the book of James. Just be aware as you read the rest of James, these three things will cycle through the rest of the book as James expands on them and uses them to address specific situations in the life of his readers.
They’ll generally occur in larger chunks. For example, he’ll take the theme of testing and endurance and treat in a fairly lengthy section and then move on to wealth and poverty or something like that or wisdom and speech. In chapter 4 there's a lengthy section on wisdom and speech. I just ended with verse 10. “In the same way with the rich, in the midst of their busy life, they will wither away.” Now he's going to start picking up the three themes and recycling them. Here’s the next verse, “blessed is the one who endures testing because such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. No one who is tested should say ‘I am being tempted by God’ for God cannot tempt or be tested by evil and he himself tempts no one, but one is tempted when by their own desires are led astray,” etc. etc. By the end of the chapter, verses 26 and 27, “religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: to look after the orphans and widows.” In chapter 2, he’ll launch into this long section on how they treat those who are poor. Generally he'll deal with these three themes in much larger sections for the rest of the book. It would be interesting to look at those themes and ask why the author emphasized those. Are those due to a situation in his readership? I already suggested that the most likely socio-economically, the emphasis on poverty, wealth and generosity probably reflects a situation where at least some of James’s readers are in the situation of poverty and perhaps even subject to the abuse of wealthy; while others are in need of encouragement to show compassion and to help these persons out with their possessions. It would be interesting to see if any of the other teachings and these other themes reflect situations within the church that James is addressing, these Jewish Christians.

Any question so far about James? There’s a couple other things we’ll look at. James bears close resemblance to Jewish wisdom type literature such as one finds in Proverbs and some of the other Jewish wisdom literature. Another feature of James that he soon become aware of is that James also, and if it's correct to identify James the brother of Jesus this might be all the more reason for him to do so, but that James’ teaching in numerous places of bears a striking resemblance to Jesus own teaching. To the extent that the parallels between James’ and Jesus’ teaching seem to suggest some kind of dependence from James
on Jesus’ teaching. It's not to think that James had access to any of the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, many of Jesus’ teachings were circulating early perhaps some of them in written form. People would've had access to Jesus’ teaching outside of the written Gospels themselves. We don't need to necessarily assume that James had read any of the four Gospels or had access to them, but certainly would have had access to Jesus teaching. The parallels are of the nature that most likely James knew the teaching of Jesus and was deliberately relying on Jesus’ teaching.

The other thing that you'll notice, I'm going to give you just a few examples that seem to be more obvious, the other thing you'll notice is that almost all them come out of Jesus teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. There are a couple others that go outside of that, but most of them come out of the Sermon of the Mount such as one finds in Matthew chapter 5-7. For example, in chapter 1 verse 12, James says in what is known as a Macarism, a blessing statement, “blessed are those.” You find that kind of statement often in Jesus’s teaching. James says, “Blessed are those who persevere under trials because when they have endured, they will receive the crown of life.” Notice what Jesus says in one of the beatitudes that we talked about the so-called beatitudes from Matthew 5:10. Jesus addressing his disciples, “Blessed are you when people insult and persecute you because of righteousness. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The main thing is that idea of blessing someone who endures persecution motivated by a promise of reward. In James’s case, it's the crown of life; in Jesus’s case, it’s the kingdom of heaven. I think they’re basically referring to the same thing.

How about this one? In chapter 2 James is addressing one of the cycles of the themes of poverty and wealth. James says, “Has not God chosen the poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom of God.” Look to Matthew 5:3, Luke doesn't have Spirit. Luke just has, “Blessed are the poor.” I'm using Matthew version, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” In chapter 5 the theme of wealth, poverty and generosity cycles back again when James addresses the rich, perhaps rich landowners, who are oppressing the poor and even stealing from them. He
says, “Your wealth has rotted. The moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded, because you hoarded wealth in the last days.” Jesus says in Matthew, “do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust can destroy.” A warning against hoarding up physical treasures, Jesus will go on later and say instead store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. You know that verse, but that's preceded by this warning against storing up physical treasures because moths and corrosion can destroy it, the very same thing James is warning against in chapter 5.

One more example is in chapter 5 verse 10. James shifts to the theme of perseverance and endurance. He says, “brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the midst of suffering, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.” James points back to some of the Old Testament prophets who suffered physically because of their preaching, especially speaking out against Israel. If you remember Matthew chapter 5, again in the Sermon on the Mount, “rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven. For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who came before you.”

There are all kinds of other examples. I think that's the last one I gave. This can be multiplied, there a number of others. Some of them are not quite as convincing. If we only had one of these examples you might be able to question whether James was really relying specifically, directly or unconsciously on Jesus’s teaching, but there's so many examples that both thematically and structurally resemble sayings of Jesus, especially from the Sermon on the Mount, suggest that James was relying on and borrowing from Jesus’ own teaching as he now instructs his readers. Along with Jewish wisdom literature providing the background for much of James’ teaching is Jesus’ own teaching, especially those found in the Sermon on the Mount. I want to enforce that I'm not suggesting James had a copy of Matthew, most likely he didn't, but James is still very much aware of Jesus’ teaching and has access to what Jesus taught, such as the sermon on the mount, and now implements that into his own instructions for these Jewish Christians who had been dispersed and are separate from their homeland.

I just want to introduce this next issue, and that is so we'll talk a little bit more about
it on Wednesday. That is the relationship between James’s teaching and Paul’s teaching. I don't want to approach it from the standpoint that we're going to harmonize these. That usually ends up meaning that James is forced to sound like Paul. At the same time I am convinced that however different these two teachings and traditions may be, that ultimately they do not contradict each other, or they are not at odds with each other, but that we need to understand what they are trying to accomplish and how they provide for complementary aspects of God's entire revelation to his people.

To reiterate what we've seen numerous times in Paul's letters, for example the book of Galatians or a text like Ephesians 2:16, “Yet we know that a person is justified not by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.” Paul says something similar in the book of Romans as well. Those are the books that the Martin Luther seized upon and left a legacy to this day in how we often read Paul.

Hear the words of James. I’ll read that one more time so you understand formally and verbally the tension “that we know that a person is justified not by works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.” Now hear James, “you see a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” You almost have a struggle there. Which one wins? Which is going to give up, or is there another way that we should read this?

Wednesday I’ll want to explore this tension a little bit more and try to understand perhaps solve it as we account for why James and Paul express themselves and the way they get did in a book like Galatians and James. So I will see you Wednesday.