

“Pure Religion”

Lesson
42
Summary

James

Scripture Summary:

James 1: If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God—Resist temptation—Be ye doers of the word—How to recognize pure religion. James 2: God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith—Salvation gained by keeping the whole law—Faith without works is dead. James 3: By governing the tongue we gain perfection—Heavenly wisdom is pure, peaceable, and full of mercy. James 4: Wars are born of lusts—The friends of the world are the enemies of God—Sin is failure to walk in the light we have received. James 5: Misery awaits the wanton rich—Await the Lord's coming with patience—The elders are to anoint and heal the sick.

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights:

Mistaking Motion for Success: The opening thought of the last lesson suggested that “purpose is preferred to procedure.” This lesson continues to convey the doctrine that true religion is measured by “spiritual clarity of conscience rather than by systematic calculated cadence.” All too often in organized religion, people mistake motion for success. It is a human tendency to believe that “doing” things takes on more importance than the Godly purpose behind them.

Judaism Has Centered on the “Do’s” and “Don’ts:” Many a rabbi has instructed that the commandments (*mitzvot*) are more important than the feelings behind them, because feelings can be altered. Yet, there seems to be a constant struggle to reach the balance of what Latter-day Saints call “faith and works.” “According to rabbinic tradition the Torah contains 613 *mitzvot*; 248 of them are positive commandments (the ‘do’ laws, e.g. Honor your father and mother) and 365 are prohibitions (the ‘don’t’ laws, e.g. You shall not eat anything on the Day of Atonement).” “Whatever the reasons for the commandments, it is clear that a person who observes them carefully will constantly be aware of the presence of God in his life. Indeed, the benediction with which the observance of most commandments is to be prefaced explicitly points to its being in conformity with God's will. Judaism insists on belief, faith and good deeds (which are also called *mitzvot*); but by themselves they are not enough. The actual observance of the *mitzvot*, notwithstanding the fact that it may occasionally cause inconvenience, is a prime doctrine of Judaism.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Spiritual Check up: “. . .the mid-19th century . . . outstanding rabbinical authority . . . (Lithuanian) of his day, Israel Lipkin . . . felt that the Jews were seeing Judaism as a ritualistic religion and were observing the *mitzvot* in a mechanical manner and ignoring the fact that Judaism requires of man to be as good and ethical as he can possibly be. He believed that this could be corrected only by intensive study of texts which discuss the proper behavior required and the way to achieve it; and he inaugurated a movement to make such study an integral part of the curriculum of the yeshivot and to establish a small ‘*musar* room’ in every neighborhood where people would go for a short period every day to ‘check up on their spiritual well being.’” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How Is it Possible That God Allows His Creatures to Suffer? Well-being is measured by comparing it to the opposite. The principle of looking at opposites helps us to understand affliction, trials of faith, tribulation, and the difficulties of life. Hence, God in His wisdom lets us experience opposites so that we may learn to be more like Him. Our focus must be on Him or we may lose hope. “One of the most serious challenges to religion is the problem of suffering. If God is all-powerful and good, as Judaism claims He is, how is it possible that He allows His creatures to suffer?” “The rabbis of the Talmud and the medieval Jewish philosophers were also troubled about the problem of suffering. Some thinkers suggested that the innocent suffer in this world so that their share in the world to come will be greater, but other philosophers rejected this idea. Another solution suggested was that suffering comes on a man in order to warn him to mend his ways and that ‘when a man sees that he is suffering, let him examine his deeds.’ The rabbis of the Talmud believed that it is a great religious virtue to bear one's suffering ‘with love,’ i.e., patiently and without becoming rebellious.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

What Can You Do to Prevent Suffering? “. . . Judaism absolutely forbids inflicting suffering on other people and even on animals. Also, no man may ignore the suffering of others but must do everything in his power to help remedy the situation. This applies to physical suffering, to poverty and to psychological suffering. Furthermore, no man has the right to enjoy himself if the rest of the community is suffering.” “The sages of the Talmud spoke of poverty in terms of both good and evil. On the one hand it is seen as an affliction which robs life of its joy and deprives man of the leisure

necessary for the study of Torah. On the other hand, poverty tests a Jew's faith and induces him to be more pious. It also stimulates generosity and sympathy in others." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

What of the Righteous Who Suffer? "Like the prophets, the rabbis were exceedingly perplexed by the problem of the 'righteous who suffers.' Among the solutions they proffered was . . . the righteous suffers on earth for the sins he committed, so that his reward in the next world may be total and complete . . . also . . . *yissurin shel ahavah*, afflictions of love, which explained the suffering of the one who has not sinned as a measure, accorded by God, of increasing the reward of the righteous in the world to come." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Do Jews Expect the Messiah to Suffer? "In traditional Judaism, the Messiah will be a human being --- albeit it a perfect one --- who will come and bring harmony to the world. He will not have a divine aspect other than having been chosen by God for his task. The Hebrew word for Messiah, *mashi'ah*, means 'anointed' and indicates that the Messiah has been chosen by God. The coming of the Messiah therefore has come to mean the redemption of the Jewish people and an end to its suffering and tribulations." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Previous Lesson (35) "Be Ye Reconciled to God:" Repeating the principle of "sinking to new heights," I repeat a true story for this lesson. A professor of religion went to the Western (wailing) Wall, microphone in hand, and began asking religious Jews why they were chosen. One responded, "We are chosen to suffer." Later, in making a point, about the suffering of the Savior, the professor said, "No one is chosen to suffer other than the Lord." Yet, the difficulties, calamities, and sufferings of the Jews will ultimately bring them closer to the Lord who covenanted to remember and save His people. Our sufferings bring us closer to understanding Him. Those that have the highest responsibilities of serving Him often suffer greatly. They "sink to new heights." ". . . all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" (Doctrine & Covenants 122:7-8)

Ecclesiastes, Wise Maxims and Counsel on Life: "Ecclesiastes' from the Greek and 'Kohelet' in Hebrew, mean leader or teacher of a group. The Book reveals the wisdom acquired by Kohelet on his journey through life. He experiences joy and sorrow, faith and doubt, vanity and humility, hypocrisy and truth. The struggle to find meaning and purpose in life was as baffling for him as it is for us today. Kohelet arrives at the conclusion that the true joy of life lies not in wealth nor in vain pleasure but in the spiritual riches of fulfilling *mitzvoth*, God's commandments. Love and reverence for the Almighty help man to accept his fate and to overcome the obstacles and temptation that continually beset him." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

"Star of David," a Reminder of Reconciliation: Once reconciled to God, the adversity in life brings His peace. That gives a spirit of fulfillment, completeness, and serenity that enables us to comfort and bless others in their difficulties. The Apostle James' admonition to "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you," reminds me of the explanation Rabbi Stanley Wagner of Denver, Colorado gave of the "Magen David." It is actually two interlocking triangles, one pointing up and the other pointing down. Dr. Wagner said, "It reminds us of our relationship to God and His relationship to us." Letting God's spirit permeate our every action will lead us to living true religion. It conveys a spiritual sweetness that enlivens our souls.

Daniel Rona, born in Israel and living in Jerusalem has authored Old & New Testament and Book of Mormon Supplement Study Materials to be used in conjunction with the weekly LDS Gospel Doctrine Lesson study. NOTE: Three versions of the supplemental study materials are available *FREE* at www.HolyLandsRevealed.com. (Just click "LDS SUPPLEMENTS")

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