

# The impact of the Hebrew Scriptures, and especially the *Torah*, on James's thought, terminology and teaching



## Authors:

Alan Raven<sup>1</sup>   
Francois P. Viljoen<sup>2</sup>   
Timothy van Aarde<sup>1</sup>

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Masters and Doctoral Studies, Faculty of Theology Faculty, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Department of New Testament, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

## Corresponding author:

Alan Raven,  
as.raven@gmail.com

## Dates:

Received: 27 Aug. 2021  
Accepted: 13 May 2022  
Published: 07 Dec. 2022

## How to cite this article:

Raven, A., Viljoen, F.P. & Van Aarde, T., 2022, 'The impact of the Hebrew Scriptures, and especially the *Torah*, on James's thought, terminology and teaching', *In die Skriflig* 56(1), a2801. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v56i1.2801>

## Copyright:

© 2022. The Authors.  
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

## Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

While James is a Christian document, it is also undeniably Jewish. This article investigated the degree to which James is rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures (i.e. Old Testament [OT]), especially the *Torah*, and how that gives meaning to what he says and teaches. The study was undertaken by establishing the likely relevance and role of the Hebrew Scriptures and particularly the *Torah* for James's first readers, and the manner and extent of James's use of these Scriptures in his Letter. The study was concluded by outlining the findings of the impact of these Scriptures on the Letter. The Greek translation of the Hebrews Scriptures was most likely the Bible of James's original recipients. As with the rest of the New Testament (NT), James shows remarkable dependence upon and ascribes unqualified authority to the Hebrew Scriptures. James draws substance from, applies, and never nullifies anything from the OT. Referring to an OT Scripture, on average, every 1.86 verses, James's thought is clearly shaped by the OT. He grounds his fundamental teachings in the *Torah* – notably in the *Shema*, Decalogue, and 'Holiness Code'. While James is silent on the ritual commandments, he focusses on the moral commandments and 'weightier matters' of the *Torah*, so much so that his entire contents may fall under 'faith/faithfulness' (or loving God, 1st Table of the Decalogue) or 'justice'/'mercy' (or loving neighbour, 2nd Table of the Decalogue). With the core of the *Torah* evidently being foundational in James, it seems appropriate to interpret James's terms and teaching in the light of and in line with the *Torah*, and especially the *Torah*'s weightier matters and moral instructions.

**Contribution:** This key finding may contribute to the debate about what James's means and teaches concerning 'law' (νόμος) his Letter.

**Keywords:** James; Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament; *Torah*; commandment(s); weightier matters of the *Torah*.

## Introduction

Prominent scholars (including Dunn 1990:251; Gench 1996:82; Hayes 1915:1562; Wadge 2014: 21–22) have classed the letter of James as 'the most Jewish' of the New Testament (NT) documents. Its teaching is so Jewish that Hayes (1915:1512) suggests that, with its few explicit references to Christ aside, it fits 'as properly in the Canon of the OT as in that of the NT'. Wadge (2014:2) notes that Essenes kept James's epistle in their library 'alongside the other revered Jewish writings, including the *Torah*'. Moreover, Kugler and Hartin (2009:504) claim that 'James shows, as no other NT writing does, that the heritage of Jesus' followers is rooted within Israel's religion'. Friedman and Friedman (2012:3) venture to say that James's topics 'are all from the five books of Moses'.

However, Sloan (1986:14) argues fairly that treating James 'as if it were merely a Jewish document', would be to undervalue his Christology, which is 'evidenced in the deep structures of [James's] thinking and belief'. Morgan (2010:31) claims that 'the teachings of Jesus are seen in virtually every section and theme of James's. Moreover, Selvaggio (2009) boldly claims that James is 'one of the most distinctively Christian, and Christ-centered documents in the New Testament'.

While James is certainly Christian (cf. Ja 1:1; 2:1; 5:7–8), it also seems to be very Jewish.<sup>1</sup> Are authentic biblical Jewishness and true biblical Christianity mutually exclusive concepts? Does James have to be the one and not the other? Can't it be both at the same time?

1. From Romans 2:25–29 it is understood that a true Jew is 'one inwardly' whose heart is circumcised by the Spirit and who practises the *Torah* as God intended it. They do not hold on to the 'tradition' (incl. 'Oral *Torah*') at the expense of neglecting the commandment of God (i.e. *Torah*) (cf. Mt 7:3).

The objective of this article is to determine the influence of the Old Testament (OT) Scriptures on James. It assesses James's use of the OT in order to determine how the Hebrew Scriptures, and especially the *Torah*, shape James's thought and give meaning to his terms and teaching. It identifies the OT citations, quotations, allusions and echoes found in the Letter. It also traces how much of James's ideas and teachings are rooted in the OT (i.e. Hebrew Scriptures), and particularly the *Torah*.

## The Old Testament as the Scriptures of James's first recipients

From James's several references (in 2:8; 2:23; 4:5) to 'the Scripture' (τὴν γραφήν), it is reasonable to assume that he presupposed that his readers were familiar with and quite possibly had access to the hearing or reading the OT Scriptures (cf. Ac 15:21). This assumption is particularly supported by James 4:5 which states, 'Or do you think the Scripture says in vain' (ἢ δοκεῖτε ὅτι κενῶς ἡ γραφή λέγει) that 'the Spirit ... yearns jealousy' (πρὸς φθόνον ἐπιποθεῖ τὸ πνεῦμα) (Raven 2021:55). While this may refer to multiple OT Scriptures, as Moo (2000:191) suggests, the original recipients would only have been fully able to appreciate James's reference here if they knew the corpus of the OT Scriptures.

James's direct citation of the Septuagint (LXX) (in 2:8; 4:6) and his use of its terms (e.g. 1:11; 2:25; 5:4, 5, 17, 20) indicate, as Johnson (2008) rightly observes, his dependence on the LXX and that his 'diction as a whole is that of the LXX'.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as James's first readers were (predominantly) Jews of the diaspora in the Greek speaking Roman Empire of the 1st century AD, it is reasonable to assume that they also used the LXX. This aligns with Law's claims (2013:119) that 'the formation of Christianity ... depended almost entirely on the Septuagint as the Old Testament', and that during the (late) 1st century 'the Septuagint was the Bible of the church'.

Accordingly, the premise that the Greek translation of the OT (the LXX) served as James's original recipients' functional canon of Scripture seems sound.

## James's use of the Old Testament

Having found that the LXX translation of the OT Scriptures likely constituted the 'Bible' (or at least one of the versions) of the author and first recipients, this section examines James's use of the OT Scriptures. This investigation starts with a consideration of the NT's use of the OT in general, and then proceeds by focussing on James as such.

## The New Testament's use of the Old Testament

Gooding (2013:1) rightfully asserts that '[t]he New Testament everywhere declares its indebtedness, indeed its dependence on, the Old Testament, and accepts its divine authority'. The 'grand assumption', according to Beale (2012:95), is that

2. According to Carson (2007:997), 'in almost all quotations from the OT the text quoted is the LXX'.

'Jesus and the apostles believed that the OT Scriptures were "sacred" and were the Word of God ... what the OT said, God said'.

Hagner (1976:78) rightly points out that the NT writers, 'were thoroughly immersed' in the Holy Scriptures (i.e. OT), and they 'lived and breathed' its contents. Hagner (1976:78) adds that the Christian Church has rightly affirmed the following observation of St. Augustine (cf. St. Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept. 2*, 73: PL 34 623; cf. DV 16): '[t]he New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old becomes evident in the New'.

Nicole (1979:617) explains that the NT 'appeals to the OT in order to provide proof of statements made, confirmation for positions espoused, illustration of principles advanced, and answers to questions raised'. Furthermore, as Burnham (1885:157–158) observed, 'all the New Testament writings can only be fully and truly interpreted in the light of Old Testament truths and facts', and 'the New Testament doctrine owes both substance and form to the same essentials that underlie and shape the teaching of the Old Testament'.

According to Nicole (1979:617), the NT contains at the very least '295 separate quotations' of the OT Scriptures.<sup>3</sup> Nicole (1979:617) adds that when 'allusions' are included, 'the count rises sharply', quoting counts by Toy (lists 613), Shires (lists 1604), Dittmar (lists 1640) and Huehn (lists 4105 instances).<sup>4</sup> Kaiser (2001) has found that:

[T]here are approximately 300 formal citations in the NT from the OT in addition to an almost incalculable influence on the language, modes of expression, and thought in the NT. (p. 3)

Moyise (2001:5) notes that studies on the NT's use of the OT, 'have found it helpful to distinguish between quotations, allusions and echoes'.<sup>5</sup> However, agreement is lacking among scholars on the terms and categories to be used (see Moyise 2000:18). For example, scholars such as Jackson (ed. 2015), distinguish between 'citations' and 'quotations'; the former being with an introductory citation formula (e.g. 'It is written', or 'the Lord says', or 'the prophet says'), and the latter without it. Other scholars such as Beale (2012:30), hold that the distinction between 'allusions' and 'echoes' can be somewhat arbitrary, and not all are 'that helpful'. Nevertheless, in this article the following categories and terms used by Jackson (ed. 2015) will be used:

- Citation: An explicit reference to Scripture with a citation formula (e.g. 'It is written', or 'the Lord says', or 'the prophet says').

3. Two hundred and seventy-eight different verses of the OT are cited (some of them several times): 94 from the Law, 99 from the Prophets, and 85 from the Writings' (Nicole 1979:617).

4. There are 7 957 verses in the New Testament. If a connection is made somehow (by way of citation/quotation, allusion, or echo) in say 4 000 verses, then a connection is made on average every 1.99 verses. This is a remarkably high level of intertextuality. Clearly the OT is woven into the fabric of the NT, and NT is saturated with OT language, expressions, precepts and concepts.

5. Moyise's (2001:5–6) definitions for the terms are: 'Quotations: are quotations of the OT usually, but not always ... indicated by a citation formula' such as 'it is written' (e.g. Mk 1:2); 'Allusions ... are less precise, picking up on a few key words and usually woven into the new composition; ... Echoes: ... when the allusion is so slight that conscious intention is unlikely'.

- Quotation: A direct reference to Scripture, largely matching the verbatim wording of the source but without a quotation formula.
- Allusion: An indirect but intentional reference to Scripture, likely intended to invoke memory of the Scripture.
- Echo: A verbal parallel evokes or recalls a Scripture (or series of Scriptures) to the reader, but likely without authorial intention to reproduce exact words.

## James's citations and quotations of the Old Testament

According to Jackson (ed. 2015), James has two 'citations', three 'quotations', 28 'allusions', and 14 'echoes' of the OT – which refers to a total of 47 OT Scriptures. Aland et al. (2012:890–901) distinguish only between 'quotations' and 'allusions and verbal parallels', listing five of the former and 45 of the latter – which refers to a total of 50 OT Scriptures. When combining these results, James refers to the *Torah* 12 times, to the Prophets 21 times, and to the Writings 25 times – a total of 58 references.<sup>6</sup> However, if only 'citations' and 'quotations' are considered then four of the five (80%) are from the *Torah*.

Focussing on the citations and quotations, the first OT quotation (citation) in James is the commandment to 'love one's neighbour as oneself' (i.e. the 'love commandment') from Leviticus 19:18 in James 2:8 which was referred to by Jesus himself (in Mt 22:39) as the second greatest commandment after the first and greatest commandment 'to love the LORD your God'.

The next two OT quotations (in Ja 2:11) are from the Ten Commandments. In the first instance, the seventh commandment is quoted (Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18). In the second instance, the sixth commandment is quoted (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17). All these are in the context of not having 'in partiality the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory' (ἐν προσωπολημψίαις ... τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης) and 'thus speaking and thus doing as those about to be judged by the *nóμου eleutherías*' (οὕτως λαλεῖτε καὶ οὕτως ποιεῖτε ὡς διὰ νόμου ἐλευθερίας μέλλοντες κρίνεσθαι – Ja 2:12). The Decalogue seems to be foundational in James's ethics.

The fourth OT quotation in James – in 2:23 – is also from the *Torah*. In this case it is the renowned Genesis 15:6 (New American Standard Bible [NASB]), which states 'Then he [Abram] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.'<sup>7</sup> James brings it up to argue that Abraham's 'faith worked with his works' (ἡ πίστις συνήργει τοῖς ἔργοις

αὐτοῦ), by his works his 'faith was perfected' (πίστις ἐτελειώθη – Ja 2:22), and Genesis 15:6 'was fulfilled' (ἐπληρώθη) that said: 'And Abraham believed and it was reckoned to him into righteousness' (Ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραάμ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην).

Strikingly, with these first four OT quotations, James is drawing both substance and authority from the *Torah* when dealing with two of the most fundamental doctrines in James and in Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

The fifth and last OT quotation (citation) in James is from the book of Proverbs in the Writings section of the OT. James 4:6 ('God opposes [the] arrogant but He gives grace to [the] humble' – θεὸς ὑπερηφάνους ἀντιτάσσει ταπεινοῖς δὲ δίδωσιν χάριν) basically<sup>9</sup> quotes Proverbs 3:34 (LXX). It can be argued that the basic elements of this teaching originate from the *Torah*. For example, Noah 'found favour'<sup>10</sup> in the eyes of the LORD and was a 'righteous man', 'blameless', and one who 'walked with God' (Gn 6:8–9 [NASB]). Pharaoh 'refused to humble [himself] before the Lord' (Ex 10:3 [NASB]) and the LORD obviously opposed him (cf. Ex 7:4; 18:10–11; Dt 6:22). Furthermore, the exhortation to 'submit then to God' (ὑποτάγητε οὖν τῷ θεῷ – Ja 4:7) is in the context of a warning against idolatry (4:4), and a reminder of God's jealousy (4:5) and 'greater grace' (4:6). The warning is certainly alluding to that against infidelity in the Prophets (e.g. Jr 3:20; Hs 3:3), as several scholars (Allison 2013:607; McKnight 2011:332; Moo 2000:186 and others) point out. But foundationally, all these elements (including prohibition against idolatry, the LORD's holy jealousy, and his abundant grace) are found in the Second Commandment (Ex 20:4–6; Dt 5:8–10).

## The *Shema*<sup>11</sup> and the *Torah*'s two greatest commandments

According to Cheung (2003:67), the prologue of James focusses on 'themes associated with the *Shema*' (Ja 1:2–18) and 'the obedience of *Torah*' (1:19–27) with both focal points being 'related to the theme of perfection' (in 1:2–4). Obedience to the *Torah* is centred on loving one's neighbour (in Ja 2:8–13) which, in turn, is a citation and application of Leviticus 19:18 as mentioned above. As Cheung (2003:189) suggests, the *Shema* is centred on loving God with 'all one's soul', 'all one's heart', and 'all one's might' as seen in Deuteronomy 6:4–6. Cheung (2003:188) furthermore points out that, in 'early rabbinic exposition' of the *Shema*,<sup>12</sup> 'all one's heart' includes both one's 'good' and 'evil inclinations'; 'all one's soul' includes loving God 'even if He takes your soul'; and 'all one's might' includes 'all your money'. Cheung (2003:188)

6. Please note: where only chapters and verses are indicated, reference is made to the Book of James.)

CITATIONS: 2:8 (Lv 19:18), 4:6 (Pr 3:34).  
 QUOTATIONS: 2:11 (Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18; Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17), 2:23 (Gn 15:6).  
 ALLUSIONS: 1:5 (Pr 2:3–6), 1:10 (Ps 102:4; Ps 102:11; Is 40:6–7), 1:11 (Is 40:6–7; Ps 102:4; 102:11), 1:19 (Ec 7:9), 1:26 (Ps 34:13; 39:1; 141:3), 2:1 (Job 34:19), 2:9 (Dt 1:17), 2:11 (Gn 22:9, 12), 2:25 (Jos 2:4; 6:17; 2:15), 3:8 (Ps 140:3), 3:9 (Gn 1:26–27), 3:18 (Is 32:17), 4:8 (Is 1:15–17; Zch 1:3; Ml 3:7; Pr 27:1), 4:10 (Job 5:11), 5:17 (1 Ki 17:1), 5:18 (1 Ki 18:42–45).

ECHOES: 2:23 (2 Chr 20:7; Is 51:2; 41:8), 4:5 (Ex 20:5), 5:5 (Jr 12:3; 25:34), 5:11 (Dn 12:12; Jn 4:2; Ex 34:6; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; Jl 2:13).

7. Also cited in Psalms 106:31, Romans 4:3, 9, 22, Galatians 3:6.

8. The two doctrines are: 'justification by faith' and 'faith expressing itself through love in action'.

9. The only variance is that *κύριος* ('LORD') in the LXX is replaced with *θεός* ('God') in James.

10. Translated *χάριν* in the LXX.

11. *Shema*: Lit. 'Hear', from the first word in Deuteronomy 6:4 ('Hear, O Israel!' [NASB]). According to Bivin (2007:159), the *Shema* refers to the citation of Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 11:13–21 and Numbers 15:37–41; it is 'regarded by Jews as the supreme affirmation of God's oneness and uniqueness'.

12. Found in *m. Berakhot* 9.5.

also proposes that these three aspects of the *Shema* are present in James 1:5–8 (further elaborated in 1:13–18), 1:2–4, and 1:9–10 respectively. Even if one finds these suggested connections with the *Shema* unconvincing, the *Shema* is evidently part of James's thinking. Allusions (likely and possible) to the *Shema* include:

- James 1:12 and 2:5: According to Johnson (2008:188), the words 'to those loving Him' (τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν) in James 1:12 allude to the 'commitment expressed by the *Shema*' and to the Second Commandment (Ex 20:6; Dt 5:10). The identical phrase, 'to those loving Him' (τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν) reoccurs in James 2:5; thus, repeating the same allusion to the *Shema*.
- James 1:19: Friedman and Friedman (2012:56–57) suggest that the instruction in 1:19, 'let every person be quick to listen' (ἔστω ... πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ταχὺς εἰς τὸ ἀκοῦσαι), parallels the instruction in the *Shema*, 'Hear, O Israel' (Ἄκουε, Ἰσραηλ – Dt 6:4 [LXX]). Contextually, this allusion is possible, as James 1:21 and 1:25 exhort the readers to receive God's word or law by hearing, doing and continuing in it.
- James 2:19: Scholars (Cheung 2003:188; Davids 1982:125; Johnson 2008:240 and others) commonly recognise that the words in James 2:19, 'you believe that God is one' (σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι εἷς ἔστιν ὁ θεός), refer to Israel's fundamental monotheistic confession of the *Shema* (Dt 6:4–6). In this regard, Moo (2000:131) rightly remarks that 'the *Shema* would have been among the most basic of beliefs' not only for James's original Jewish Christian readers, but also for the early church as a whole, because they 'appropriated' the *Shema*'s confession (cf. 1 Cor 8:4–6; Gl 3:20; Eph 4:6; 1 Tm 2:5).
- James 4:12: According to Cheung (2003:188), another '*Shema*-like statement' is found in James 4:12, which states: 'One is Lawgiver and Judge' (εἷς ἔστιν νομοθέτης καὶ κριτής). Allison (2013:637) concurs by noting that 'the Jewish hearers of James would likely recall Deuteronomy 6:4' here, especially because the *Shema* has already been referred to in James 2:19.

If the allusions to the *Shema* mentioned above are correct, then both sections of the prologue (Ja 1:2–18; 1:19–27), and two of the three main sections of the Letter (Ja 2:1–27; 4:11–5:12) all make connections with the *Shema*. Furthermore, one could argue that the other main section (Ja 3:1–4:10) is at least true to the *Shema* in its warning against idolatry (Ja 4:4–6) which is undoubtedly meant to spur the readers on to loving God first and foremost as instructed in the *Shema* and the first two of the Ten Commandments.

It is concluded that James's teaching is deeply rooted in the *Shema* (Dt 6:4–6) and 'love commandment' (Lv 19:18) which encapsulate the two greatest commandments as taught by Jesus (Mt 22:36–40). Evidently, James is firmly grounded in the teaching of the *Torah*. Moreover, this 'shows considerable parallel with the emphasis of the double commandments of love<sup>13</sup> in the Jesus tradition', as Cheung (2003:274) rightly observes.

13. Loving God and loving your neighbour (Mt 22:37–40).

## The holiness code

According to Kamell (2009:158), the Epistle of James closely compares<sup>14</sup> with Deuteronomy 10:12–22 in at least its concern about 'treatment of the poor as a justice issue'. Whether or not James drew specifically from Deuteronomy 10:12–22 is not clear. What is certain, however, is that James's teaching is consistent with it and there are several parallels with Deuteronomy 10:12–22, including the *Shema* language (Dt 10:12 and Ja 1:12; 2:19), doing (the commandments of) the *Torah* (Dt 10:13 and Ja 1:25; 2:12; 4:12), not showing partiality (Dt 10:17 and Ja 2:1, 9), and providing justice to the fatherless and the widow (Dt 10:18 and Ja 1:27).

While there are mutual concerns between James and Deuteronomy 10:12–22, it does seem as if James has even stronger links with Leviticus 19 (the so-called 'Holiness Code').<sup>15</sup> In his study on James's use of Leviticus 19, Johnson (1982:399) concluded that 'the evidence ... strongly suggests that James made conscious and sustained use of Leviticus 19:12–18'. In addition to the direct citation of Leviticus 19:18b in James 2:8, Johnson (1982:399) proposes that James contains up to six more 'verbal or thematic allusions' to Leviticus 19:12–18, including (1) Leviticus 19:12 in James 5:12; (2) Leviticus 19:13 in James 5:4; (3) Leviticus 19:15 in James 2:1 and 9; (4) Leviticus 19:16 in James 4:11; (5) Leviticus 19:17b in James 5:20; and (6) Leviticus 19:18a in James 5:9 with the first four being 'certain' and the last two 'likely'.

Johnson (1982:401) believes that 'James engages in halachic midrash', with the text being Leviticus 19:12–18. Similarly, Kaiser (1998:74, 217) contends that the Letter of James, 'is built on a homily from the law of holiness' (Lv 19:12–18), and functions as a 'commentary, either by direct citation or by allusion' on the selection from Leviticus. Friedman and Friedman (2012:2) comment that James 'expounds upon ... subjects found in Leviticus 19–22',<sup>16</sup> which 'constitutes a single Sabbath reading'.

James's use of Leviticus 19 (and the Decalogue), as Johnson (1982:399–401) rightly contends, indicates that James considered the 'Royal Law' (νόμον βασιλικὸν – 2:8) and the 'Law of Liberty' (νόμου ἐλευθερίας – 2:12) 'as explicated concretely and specifically' by the Decalogue and the commandments of Leviticus 19:12–18.

The following findings can be drawn from James's use of Leviticus 19:

- Holiness is important for James as is evident from his extensive use of the 'Holiness Code' (Lv 19). This is supported by James's statements concerning holy living, including: 'Pure and undefiled religion with the God and

14. The 'close comparison' includes James's discussions on: (1) 'God's electing grace of His people' in 1:18; (2) 'justice for widows and orphans' in 1:27; (3) 'impartiality' in 2:1–11 and 3:17; and (4) 'caring for the needy' in 2:14–26.

15. Derived from the opening and overarching instruction in Leviticus 19:1–2 (NASB): <sup>1</sup>Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy".

16. The bulk of the topics are found in Leviticus 19.

Father is this' (θηρσκεία καθαρὰ καὶ ἀμίαντος παρὰ τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτῆ ἐστὶν – 1:27), and 'But the wisdom from above, first indeed is pure' (ἡ δὲ ἄνωθεν σοφία πρῶτον μὲν ἀγνή ἐστὶν – 3:17).

- Carrying out or fulfilling the 'νόμον βασιλικὸν' (νόμον βασιλικὸν – Ja 2:8; Lv 19:18b) is not just about loving one's neighbour, but it is also about living a holy life.
- Both the 'νόμον βασιλικὸν' (νόμον βασιλικὸν) and the command that 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν – Ja 2:8; Lv 19:18b) are fulfilled by keeping the very practical commandments of the *Torah*, such as not to 'show partiality' (προσωπολημπτέω – Ja 2:1, 9; Lv 19:15), not to 'speak against' (καταλαλέω) one another (Ja 4:11; Lv 19:16), not to 'hold back' (ἀποστρέφω) wages (Ja 5:4; Lv 19:13), not to 'complain' (στενάζω) against one another (Ja 5:9; Lv 19:18a), not to 'swear' (ὀμνύω) by any oath (Ja 5:12; Lv 19:12), and to 'turn' (ἐπιστρέφω) a sinner from error (Ja 5:20; Lv 19:17b). This applies for the NT believer, just as it applied for the OT believer.

### The weightier matters of the *Torah*

James does not mention any ritual observances of the *Torah*. He shows 'no concern' for 'circumcision', 'special days or feasts' or 'dietary or purity regulations' as Johnson (2008:30) observes. However, it does not necessarily follow, based on James's silence, that he no longer saw value in the 'ritual law'. Rather, as Allison (2013:353–354) and Moo (2000:18) rightly argue, it seems better to conclude that the 'ritual law' was not a particular issue for James's readers that needed addressing. Instead, James concentrated on the 'weightier matters of the *Torah*' as Jesus did (cf. Mt 23:23).<sup>17</sup>

Hagner (1995:670) explains that the essential and significant matters of 'justice' (κρίσις), 'mercy' (ἔλεος), and 'faith' or 'faithfulness' (πίστις – Mt 23:23) are 'at the heart of the OT' and shows 'close affinity' to Jesus' two-fold summary of the *Torah* in Matthew 22:37–40. As France (2007:873) rightly observes (see also Davies & Allison 2004:294), they (i.e. the triad of *Torah*'s 'weightier matters') are 'strongly reminiscent of the famous summary' in Micah 6:8 (Tree of Life Version [TLV]): 'practice justice' (ποιεῖν κρίμα [LXX]), 'love mercy' (ἀγαπᾶν ἔλεον [LXX]), and 'walk humbly with your God' (ἔτοιμον εἶναι τοῦ πορεύεσθαι [LXX]).<sup>18</sup> Waltke (2009:734) explains that practicing 'justice' (*mišpāt* – Masoretic Text [MT]) and 'mercy' (*hesed* [MT]) both pertain to caring for the 'oppressed' – with the 'accent' of the first on the 'action', and the second on the 'attitude' (Raven 2021:75). Furthermore, as Waltke (2009:734–735) elucidates, 'justice and mercy' expresses 'covenant solidarity on the human level', and 'walk humbly with your God' expresses it 'to God'; or as Keil and Delitzsch (1996:336) express it, the first two 'embrace all commandments of the second table'.

<sup>17</sup>Cheung (2003:116, 119) concurs.

<sup>18</sup>Micah 6:8 in turn can be traced back to Deuteronomy 10:12–13 (NASB): 'Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, [13] and to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?'

**TABLE 1:** James's content as 'weightier matters of the *Torah*.

Section in James	Love God (1st Table) – Faith/faithfulness	Love neighbour (2nd Table) – Justice and mercy
(1:2–4) Trials and testing of faith	X	-
(1:5–8) Prayer of faith without doubting	X	-
(1:9–11) Humility and riches	X	-
(1:13–15) Enduring temptation	X	-
(1:16–18) God's invariable goodness	X	-
(1:19–27) Continue in and do the <i>nómon téleion</i> ...	-	X
(2:1–7) Faith without partiality	-	X
(2:8–13) Speak and do the <i>nóμου eleutherias</i>	-	X
(2:14–26) Faith with works	-	X
(3:1–12) Controlling the tongue	-	X
(3:13–18) Wisdom from above	-	X
(4:1–10) Friendship with the world or God	X	-
(4:11–12) Doers of the <i>nóμου</i> and not judges of it	-	X
(4:13–17) Not to be boastful about future plans	X	-
(5:1–6) Warning to the rich	-	X
(5:7–11) Patience for the Lord's coming	X	-
(5:12) Let your 'yes' be yes and 'no' be no	-	X
(5:13–18) The power of prayer	X	-
(5:19–20) Restoring sinners	-	X

Arguably, the third embraces the commandments of the first table of the Decalogue.

James's concern for 'faith' or 'faithfulness' is seen at the beginning of both the introduction and body of the Letter (Ja 1:2; 2:1). His concern for 'justice' and 'mercy' is explicit in several locations in the Letter, including in James 1:27; 2:4, 9, 15–16; 5:4–6. The need for 'mercy' is especially stressed in that it is held above judgement (in Ja 2:13) and James's readers are exhorted or encouraged to be 'full of mercy' (μεστὴ ἐλέους – 3:17). So pervasive and sustained is James's focus on the 'weightier matters of the *Torah*' that every section of the Letter may fall under 'faith /faithfulness' (or loving God – 1st Table) or 'justice'/'mercy' (or loving neighbour – 2nd Table), as demonstrated in Table 1.

With the proposed categorisations in Table 1, it is recognised that some sections do not neatly fit in the one or other column of Table 1, but could fit in both. This is not surprising, as our love for God does show in our love towards our neighbours (cf. 1 Jn 3:17; 4:12, 20).

Another observation from the Table above is that the key sections about practising *nómos* (Ja 1:19–27; 2:8–13; 4:11–12) and wisdom from above (3:13–18) are about 'justice' and 'mercy' (or loving one's neighbour). Again, theologically, this is an outflow of our love for God.

### Conclusion

The following findings emerge from the whole discussion above:

- James refers (by way of citations, quotations, allusions and echoes) to no less than 58 OT Scriptures (from the *Torah*, the Prophets and the Writings) in 108 verses.

Clearly his thought is immersed in and shaped by the Hebrew Scriptures. By implication, James is to be interpreted in light of those OT references.

- Each citation or quotation from the OT gives authority to what James is asserting or teaching. In turn, James's teaching indicates the currency of the Hebrew Scriptures and its continuing power to instruct. In none of the references to the OT does James display anything apart from total respect for and submission to the Hebrews Scriptures. Perhaps his view of the OT can be summed up with his statement in James 4:5: 'Or do you think the Scripture says in vain ...' (ἢ δοκεῖτε ὅτι κενῶς ἡ γραφὴ λέγει ...).
- In his use of the OT, James grounds his fundamental teachings of 'justification by faith' (Ja 2:23) and 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Ja 2:8) in the *Torah*.
- The 'νόμον basilikòn' [Kingdom *Torah*] (Ja 2:8) is grounded in the Ten Commandments (two of which are quoted in James 2:11) and expounded by several instructions in the 'Holiness Code' (Ja 2:1, 9; 4:11; 5:4, 9, 12, 20).
- By alluding to the *Shema* several times in his Letter (Ja 1:12, 19; 2:5, 19; 4:12), James recalls the most fundamental confession<sup>19</sup> and the greatest commandment<sup>20</sup> as stipulated in the *Torah*. In support of the greatest commandment, James cites the Writings (in 4:6) in the context of allusions to the second of the Ten Commandments (4:4–6).
- While James is silent on the ritual commandments of the *Torah*, he seems to focus solely on the moral commandments and weightier matters of the *Torah*, including 'justice', 'mercy', and 'faithfulness/faith' – the first two expressing love towards one's neighbour, and the last expresses love towards God.

It is concluded that the *Torah* is foundational in James's thought, terminology, and teaching. This has obvious relevance, for example, for the interpretation of the meaning and teaching of 'law' (νόμος) in James.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

### Authors' contributions

R.A., writing – original draft; V.F.P., writing – reviewing and editing, and supervising; V.A.T., writing – reviewing and editing.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

19. Deuteronomy 6:4 (NASB): Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

20. Deuteronomy 6:5 (NASB): You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might.

The PhD research from which the material for this article has been drawn, has, however, received bursary funds.

### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

## References

- Aland, B., Aland, K., Karavidopoulos, J., Martini, C.M. & Metzger, B.M., 2012, *The Greek New Testament*, 4th edn., Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft & United Bible Societies, Stuttgart.
- Allison, D.C. Jr, 2013, *James: A critical and exegetical commentary*, The International Critical Commentary, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, New York, NY.
- Beale, G.K., 2012, *Handbook on the New Testament use of the Old Testament, exegesis and interpretation*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Bivin, D., 2007, *New light on the difficult words of Jesus, insights from his Jewish context*, En-Gedi Resource Centre, Holland, MI.
- Burnham, S., 1885, 'The value of the Old Testament for a correct knowledge of the New', *The Old Testament Student* 5(4), 157–161. <https://doi.org/10.1086/469720>
- Carson, D.A., 2007, 'James', in G.K. Beale & D.A. Carson (eds.), *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament*, pp. 997–1014, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Cheung, L.L., 2003, *The genre, composition, and hermeneutics of the epistle of James*, Paternoster, Milton Keynes.
- Dauids, P.H., 1982, *The epistle of James: A commentary on the Greek text*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Davies, W.D. & Allison, D.C. Jr, 2004, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the gospel according to Saint Matthew* (Vol. 3), International Critical Commentary, T&T Clark, London.
- Dunn, J.D.G., 1990, *Unity and diversity in the New Testament: An inquiry into the character of earliest Christianity*, SCM, London.
- France, R.T., 2007, *The gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Friedman, D. & Friedman, B.D., 2012, *James the just, Yeshua's brother & Chief Rabbi of the Messianic Community, presents applications of Torah*, A Messianic Commentary, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Clarksville, MD.
- Gench, F.T., 1996, 'Hebrews and James', in P.D. Miller & D.L. Bartlett (eds.), *Westminster Bible Companion*, p. 82, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.
- Gooding, D., 2013, *The riches of divine wisdom: The New Testament's use of the Old Testament*, The Myrtlefield Trust, Coleraine.
- Hagner, D.A., 1976, 'The Old Testament in the New Testament', in S.J. Schultz & M.A. Inch (eds.), *Interpreting the word of God. Festschrift in honor of Steven Barabas*, pp. 78–104, Moody Press, Chicago, IL.
- Hagner, D.A., 1995, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary, Word Incorporated, Dallas, TX.
- Hayes, D., 1915, 'James, the epistle of', in J. Orr (ed.), *The International standard Bible encyclopaedia*, pp. 1562–1567, The Howard-Severance Company, Chicago, IL.
- Jackson, J.G. (ed.), 2015, *New Testament use of the Old Testament*, Faithlife, Bellingham.
- Johnson, L.T., 1982, 'The use of Leviticus 19 in the letter of James', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 101(3), 391–401. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3260351>
- Johnson, L.T., 2008, *The letter of James*, The Anchor Bible Commentaries, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Kaiser, W.C. Jr, 1998, *The Christian and the 'Old' Testament*, William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA.
- Kaiser, W.C. Jr, 2001, *The uses of the Old Testament in the New*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR.
- Kamell, M.J., 2009, 'The economics of humility: The rich and the humble in James', in B. Longenecker & K. Leibengood (eds.), *Economic dimensions of early Christianity*, pp. 157–175, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Keil, C.F. & Delitzsch, F., 1996, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA.
- Kugler, R.A. & Hartin, P.J., 2009, *An introduction to the Bible*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Law, T.M., 2013, *When God spoke Greek, The Septuagint and the making of the Christian Bible*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- McKnight, S., 2011, *The Letter of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

- Moo, D.J., 2000, *The letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Eerdmans Apollos, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Morgan, C.W., 2010, *A theology of James: Wisdom for God's people*, ed. R.A. Peterson, P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg.
- Moyise, S., 2000, 'Intertextuality and the study of the Old Testament in the New Testament', in S. Moyise (ed.), *The Old Testament in the New Testament, essays in honour of J.L. North*, pp. 14–41, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield.
- Moyise, S., 2001, *The Old Testament in the New: An introduction*, T&T Clark, New York, NY.
- Nicole, R., 1979, 'The Old Testament in the New Testament', in F.E. Gaebelin (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible commentary: Introductory articles*, vol. 1, pp. 615–628, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Raven, A., 2021, 'The meaning and teaching of νόμος in James', PhD thesis, Department of New Testament, North-West University, Potchefstroom.
- Selvaggio, A., 2009, 'Hearing the voice of Jesus in the epistle of James', in *Reformation 21*, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals Inc., viewed 27 May 2018, from <https://www.reformation21.org/articles/hearing-the-voice-of-jesus-in-the-epistle-of-james.php>.
- Sloan, R.B., 1986, 'Christology in James', *Criswell Theological Review* 1(1), 3–29.
- Wadge, R.B., 2014, *Discovering the Jewish Roots of the letter of James*, Part of Discovering the Jewish Roots Commentary Series, Jewish Roots Publishing, US.
- Waltke, B.K., 2009, 'Micah', in T.E. McComiskey (ed.), *The minor Prophets: An exegetical commentary*, pp. 591–764, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI.