Praise for *A Theology of James*

Scholarly but accessible, clearly written but not simplistic, Chris Morgan's *A Theology of James* is an excellent example of biblical theology for the church.

—Robert L. Plummer, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Morgan deftly shows how James can—and does—interact in a clear, concise manner with the questions of the larger theological field. This book will be a much-needed addition to any pastor's library, a great guide for any Bible study group studying James, and a highly useful supplement to any college or seminary course on James.

—Mariam Kamell, Regent College

Dr. Morgan delivers a robust theological exposition of James with an eye to the needs of the contemporary church. He chooses key themes from the book and shows how they are developed, assisting the reader to see the pastoral heart of James in a new and more unified theological light. His insights issue a personal challenge to every reader.

—John Massey, Baptist Theological Seminary, Singapore, International Mission Board (SBC)

Too often the theology of James is ignored or forgotten in the evangelical church. Chris Morgan reminds us in this wonderfully lucid, practical, and faithful rendition of James's theology that James's teaching is not only in accord with the gospel but fundamental to the gospel.

—Thomas R. Schreiner, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Morgan has produced a no-frills study rich with potential for injecting new fervor into churches tired of the status quo. Read it! Morgan not only explains to us James's teaching, he also commends to us the costly pattern of James's sold-out life.

—Robert W. Yarbrough, Covenant Theological Seminary

Praise for the Explorations in Biblical Theology series

Neither superficial nor highly technical, this new series of volumes on important Christian doctrines is projected to teach Reformed theology as it is most helpfully taught, with clear grounding in Scripture, mature understanding of theology, gracious interaction with others who disagree, and useful application to life. I expect that these volumes will strengthen the faith and biblical maturity of all who read them, and I am happy to recommend them highly.

—Wayne Grudem, Phoenix Seminary

There are many misconceptions today about systematic, biblical, and applicatory theology. One sometimes gets the impression that these are opposed to one another, and that the first two, at least, are so obscure that ordinary people should avoid them like the plague. The series Explorations in Biblical Theology seeks to correct these misunderstandings, to bring these disciplines together in a winsome, clear unity, edifying to non-specialists. The authors are first-rate, and they write to build up our faith by pointing us to Christ. That's what biblical and systematic theology at their best have always done, and the best application of Scripture has always shown us in practical ways how to draw on the rich blessings of Jesus' salvation. I hope that many will read these books and take them to heart.

—John Frame, Reformed Theological Seminary

The message of a God who loved us before he formed the earth, called us his own before we could respond to him, died for us while we were dead in our transgressions and sins, made us alive when we were incapable of serving him, unites us to himself so that we can be forever holy, and now loves us more than we love ourselves—sparked a Reformation of hope and joy that transformed the world of faith. Re-declaring that hope and reclaiming that joy is the ambition and delight of this series. Able and godly scholars trace the golden thread of grace that unites all Scripture

to make the wonders of our God's redeeming love shine and win hearts anew. The writing is warm, winsome, and respectful of those who differ. The motives are clearly to reveal truth and expose error by glorifying the message and manner of the Savior.

—Bryan Chapell, Covenant Theological Seminary

The aim of these volumes is clear: as regards God's Word, rigor; as regards other scholars, respect; as regards current issues, relevance; as regards the Lord himself, reverence. Effective witness and ministry currently require more than extra effort and better methods: the call is heard from churches across the board for renewal in our grasp of Christian truth. Each author in this series contributes admirably to that urgent need.

—Robert W. Yarbrough, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

This is a series that the church needs more than ever, as we forge fresh links between the world of biblical studies and our Reformed theology. The contributors remind us again that the Bible is a book about God and his purposes and encourages us to preach and teach the message of salvation which it contains. It will be an inspiration to many and will give us new insight into the faith once delivered to the saints.

—Gerald Bray, Beeson Divinity School

The church of Jesus Christ faces massive cultural challenges today. More and more people in the Western world are ignorant of or hostile to the Christian faith. The moral fabric of our society is unraveling, and as a result of postmodernism many are adopting a relativistic worldview. Some Christians have responded by trying to simplify and dumb down the gospel. Others have tried to catch the cultural mood of the day in order to gain more converts, but they have often been co-opted by the culture instead of transforming it for Christ. What we truly need is to dig down deep into biblical foundations, so that our theology is robustly biblical. Only a worldview that is informed by both biblical and systematic theology can withstand the intellectual challenges

that face us today. The series Explorations in Biblical Theology is designed to meet this very need. I commend these volumes enthusiastically, for they explain what the Scriptures teach from the standpoint of biblical theology. What we desperately need to hear and learn today is the whole counsel of God. This series advances that very agenda for the edification of the church and to the glory of God.

—Thomas R. Schreiner, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Explorations in Biblical Theology is a valuable new series of books on doctrinal themes that run through Scripture. The contributors are competent scholars who love to serve the church and have special expertise in the Bible and its theology. Following a thematic approach, each volume explores a distinctive doctrine as it is taught in Scripture, or else introduces the various doctrines taught in a particular book of the Bible. The result is a fresh and unique contribution to our understanding of the Bible's own theology.

—Philip Ryken, Wheaton College

Explorations in Biblical Theology is a gift to God's people. Biblical theology was never meant to be reserved for academics. When the verities of the Reformed faith are taken from the "ivy halls" of academia and placed in the hearts and minds of the covenant people of God, reformation and revival are the inevitable result. I believe God will use this series as a mighty tool for the Kingdom.

—Steve Brown, Reformed Theological Seminary

A Theology of James

Explorations in Biblical Theology

Election and Free Will: God's Gracious Choice and Our Responsibility

Anointed with the Spirit and Power: The Holy Spirit's Empowering Presence

The Nearness of God: His Presence with His People

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A Theology of James: Wisdom for God's People

Robert A. Peterson, series editor

A Theology of James

Wisdom for God's People

Christopher W. Morgan

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To my loving and joyful daughter Chelsey,
a precious gift from the Lord

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Series Introduction

BELIEVERS TODAY need quality literature that attracts them to good theology and builds them up in their faith. Currently, readers may find several sets of lengthy—and rather technical—books on Reformed theology, as well as some that are helpful and semipopular. Explorations in Biblical Theology takes a more mid-range approach, seeking to offer readers the substantial content of the more lengthy books, on the one hand, while striving for the readability of the semipopular books, on the other.

The series includes two types of books: (1) some treating biblical themes and (2) others treating the theology of specific biblical books. The volumes dealing with biblical themes seek to cover the whole range of Christian theology, from the doctrine of God to last things. Representative early offerings in the series focus on the empowering of the Holy Spirit, justification, the presence of God, preservation and apostasy, and substitutionary atonement. Works dealing with the theology of specific biblical books include volumes on 1 and 2 Samuel, the Psalms, and Isaiah in the Old Testament, and Mark, Romans, and James in the New Testament.

Explorations in Biblical Theology is written for college seniors, seminarians, pastors, and thoughtful lay readers. These volumes are intended to be accessible and not obscured by excessive references to Hebrew, Greek, or theological jargon.

Each book seeks to be solidly Reformed in orientation, because the writers love the Reformed faith. The various theological themes and biblical books are treated from the perspective of biblical theology. Writers either trace doctrines through the Bible or open up the theology of the specific books they treat.

Writers desire not merely to dispense the Bible's good information, but also to apply that information to real needs today.

Explorations in Biblical Theology is committed to being warm and winsome, with a focus on applying God's truth to life. Authors aim to treat those with whom they disagree as they themselves would want to be treated. The motives for the rejection of error are not to fight, hurt, or wound, but to protect, help, and heal. The authors of this series will be godly, capable scholars with a commitment to Reformed theology and a burden to minister that theology clearly to God's people.

Robert A. Peterson
Series Editor

Acknowledgments

GOD HAS MADE US for himself and to live in community with others. I am grateful for the community that God has placed in my life to shape me and my thinking. And while there are surely many errors in this book, I am convinced there are not nearly as many as there would be if it were not for these friends. There are too many to mention all of them, but I want to express gratitude to those who have made an impact on this project.

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Introduction

NON-CHRISTIANS do not read the Bible; they read Christians. Because of this, the church's mission is inevitably tied to its example. Tim Keller points out that the Bible depicts "the extremely close connection between deed-ministry and word-ministry. The practical actions of Christians for people in need demonstrate the truth and power of the gospel. Acts of mercy and justice are visible to non-believers and can lead men to glorify God (Matt. 5:13–16)."[1] That the character and justice of the kingdom community are foundational to its witness was true of Israel and remains true for the church, as Christopher Wright explains: "The community God seeks for the sake of his mission is to be a community shaped by his own ethical character, with specific attention to righteousness and justice in a world filled with oppression and injustice. Only such a community can be a blessing to the nations."[2]

Indeed, many pastors and church leaders are inspired by knowing what the church can and should be. We invest our time, our prayers, our jobs—our very selves—in hopes of seeing the church become what God intends. The more we study and teach the Bible, the more we realize how important the church is. God elected it, Jesus bought it, and the Spirit indwells it. One day Jesus will present the church to himself as a perfectly beautiful bride. We also begin to notice that the church of the New Testament is imperfect, wedged historically in the eschatological already and not yet—and with power, personality, and cultural struggles. Yet in the New Testament we also see that the church is passionate about the gospel, serious about obeying Christ, diligent to take the

1. Tim Keller, "The Gospel and the Poor," *Themelios* 33, no. 3 (December 2008): 17.

2. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 369.

gospel to all nations, generous in meeting the needs of the poor, and concerned to seek unity, even in the midst of some major cultural clashes between Jews and Gentiles.

However, the more we serve the Lord in our churches, the more we come to grips with another reality, this one a bit disheartening: most individual churches are not what they are supposed to be. These covenant communities do not exhibit as much passion for Christ, genuine love for others, servant spirit, or ministry to the hurting as we expect. Many churches exchange God's global purpose of making disciples of all nations for the task of maintaining the status quo. Much of their leadership, budgets, and programs are centered on themselves.

The irony is that we encounter these two truths at the very same time. The more we grow in our theology, the more value we place on the church. Yet the older we get and the more experience we have in serving churches, the more problems we see in the church. Biblically minded church leaders always have sensed—and until Jesus returns, always will sense—the tension between an ideal view of the church and a realistic view of churches. In fact, it is when pastors or church leaders stop feeling this tension that danger lurks. That is likely a sign of lowered standards, naïveté, or disillusionment. In many respects, the churches we serve are not what they are supposed to be, but this should not lead us to despair, but to service to the Lord who can strengthen them.

If we understand the biblical teaching regarding the already and the not yet, then this tension should not come as a surprise. It exists because the kingdom has already come in Christ, but has not yet been fully realized. The church, as the eschatological covenant community, is to bear the marks of the kingdom, yet will not do so perfectly until the grand finale of history, when the church is presented to Christ.

The epistle of James bears witness to this tension. This letter is written to real-life churches with real-life problems. Its message needs to be heard by churches today.

James, a key leader in the Jerusalem church, writes to help churches consisting of Jewish Christians who are struggling with

oppression from without and strife from within. Some of them also slip easily into being religious without genuinely following Christ. Throughout his letter, James counters these problems and more as he offers wisdom for consistency in the covenant community, the church. And James addresses these challenges with a robust theology. While many think of the epistle of James as loaded with exhortations—and it is—it is much more than that. James offers pastoral instruction that is grounded in systematic theology. It is theology applied.

Like many epistles in the New Testament, the letter of James is comparable to an iceberg. The letter itself is like the visible portion that extends above the surface of the water. Yet what is underneath is much larger and shapes what is visible. The challenge of biblical theology is that we can only see what protrudes, but must also take into account the shaping mass that lies beneath. We cannot act as if what is visible is all that exists. Yet in our exploration of what is hidden, we must not distort what we do see. Hence, our goal is to examine the themes that lie above the surface, and then try to examine the underlying theology that shapes it.[3] Before we do, though, we should address some questions.

Why a Theology of James?

Many pastors and some church leaders are acquainted with both biblical exegesis and systematic theology. They have been taught how to read the Bible and how to teach or preach it in an expository manner. They have studied the major doctrines of the Christian faith, such as the doctrines of God, humanity, sin, Christ, salvation, the church, and last things. Many, however, have not drunk at the well of biblical theology. They have studied the particulars and the big picture, but they are usually not acquainted with what lies in between. An analogy might help. If we wanted to survey a large tract of land, we might do so from various points

3. I adapted this analogy from Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 28.

of view. We might walk through it, drive through it, or fly over it in a helicopter. In a way, walking through it would be like biblical exegesis. Every piece of the terrain is observed. Flying over it is like systematic theology, as it orients us to the major contours of the land. Driving through it is comparable to biblical theology, as it covers the bulk of the terrain and yet gives a fairly broad perspective. All three approaches have their place.

While relying upon careful exegesis and being informed by systematic theology, this volume is a work in biblical theology and therefore seeks to connect the dots of the particular texts in the epistle of James and show its primary message. It also seeks to show the big picture of James, its specific themes, and how those themes point to the larger message. It seeks to demonstrate that while particular passages have important messages, biblical books also have larger, overarching messages that merit attention. Sometimes we get so focused on the specific truths of specific passages that we forget to read them in light of the overarching literary context. In contrast to our tendency, however, the epistle of James was likely written to be read to churches in its entirety, and thus was viewed primarily as a whole. A holistic look at James will enhance our understanding, teaching, and preaching.

I also feel the need for this book because James has received little attention theologically, although this is beginning to change. Much of the attention that James does receive is tied to the issue of justification (by faith alone or by faith and works). James's other themes and overall theology have much to offer and should not be neglected.

In keeping with the purpose of the Explorations in Biblical Theology series, this volume does not address all of the scholarly debates concerning James, although those who are familiar with such debates will likely spot my views on many of the issues. Instead, I will set forth the primary themes and theology of James, so that the big picture of its message can be better seen. I will also assess how James's teaching is related to, and informed by, other biblical writers. And upon that foundation I intend to sketch out the overall theology of James.

What Is "a Theology of James"?

The title of this book indicates that James has a coherent theology and is by nature theological. Something of a theology of James can be uncovered through a careful reading of this epistle. James is not too obscure to make this theological quest impossible or foolish. James's theology serves as a presupposition to his letter and is to some extent traceable in it. His exhortations are based upon his theology, which seems to be rooted in the Old Testament, Judaism, and the teachings of Jesus. James has a theology, and we can to some extent discover it.

However, a full-blown theology of James cannot be uncovered (it is hard enough to construct a theology of Paul). After all, the epistle has only five short chapters and was written to address specific needs; it is not a textbook of systematic theology. James's theology is present to a greater extent than most scholars have recognized and serves as the underpinnings of his letter, but it is not as carefully constructed as Paul's. So I do not claim to produce here "*the* theology of James." Nevertheless, by looking carefully at the epistle, we can make strides toward understanding James's theology. Or, to return to our iceberg imagery, we can understand what we see above the surface, and we can detect some things that lie beneath the surface, but we cannot know as much as we would like about what lies beneath.

How Do We Examine the Theology of James?

We begin in chapter 1, "James in Context," by examining the historical and literary context of James. This chapter provides the background information necessary to interpret James. Reading without knowing the context is like listening to one part of someone else's conversation—we may only understand a portion of it. "James in Context" addresses James and his ministry, the churches and their problems, and the epistle and its characteristics.

In chapter 2, we examine "Influences on James's Thought." No one writes as an island unto himself. James was no different. He

was significantly influenced by the Old Testament law, prophets, and wisdom literature. Even more, James displays an incredible dependence upon the teachings of Jesus. This can be seen in every section of the letter. The more we see how James is rooted in the teachings of the Old Testament and Jesus, the more we can understand his theology.

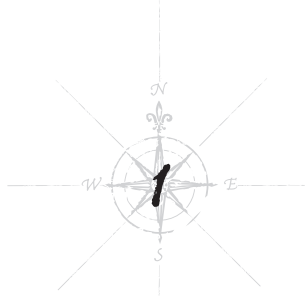
The next step is to consider the particular teachings of James in their immediate literary context. This, however, is the task of a biblical commentary and not this volume. I have not skipped this crucial step, however, since I recently coauthored (with Dale Ellenburg) just such a commentary: *James: Wisdom for the Community*.

Building upon that exegetical foundation, we strive to ascertain the major themes of James. "James's Pastoral Burden: Wisdom for Consistency in the Community" (chapter 3) summarizes the central, integrative concern of James, which shapes the other themes. Those themes are then examined in chapters 4 through 9: wisdom, consistency, suffering, the poor, words, and God's word and law.

With that background, we are then able to examine the well-known issue concerning James and Paul. James 2:14–26 often raises questions about its compatibility with Paul's theology of justification by faith apart from the works of the law. In "James and Paul" (chapter 10), we examine those questions.

Then we sketch out James's larger theology in chapter 11. We see James's theological contributions concerning God, humanity, sin, Christ, salvation, the Christian life, the church, and last things. In chapter 12, we see how James's theology functions in his letter.

Finally, James's message for first-century churches merits the attention of our own twenty-first–century churches. Accordingly, the final chapter proposes that James's God-centered theology, vision of the church, holistic approach to salvation and mission, and integrative method of theology serve as helpful correctives to, and models for, both traditional and missional churches.



1

James in Context

WHO WROTE the epistle of James? When, to whom, and why was it written? What literary style, form, and structure does it have? As we find the answers to these questions, we will discover something pivotal for interpreting the letter: behind the epistle of James lies the story of a minister urging churches to be more consistent in their Christian walk.

James and His Ministry

In his greeting, the author identifies himself as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings" (1:1). Three views on the identity of the author stand out.

James, the Brother of Jesus?

The author names himself "James," but does not elaborate. This lack of elaboration probably means that he had no need to do so, as he was known by his readers and was probably recognized widely in the church. The traditional view is that James, the brother of Jesus, is the author. He was the most prominent leader bearing this name in the early church.[1]

1. Douglas J. Moo, *James*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 19–20 (hereafter abbreviated as Moo, *James*, TNTC). Because of the virgin

What do we know about this James? In their lists of Jesus' brothers, both Matthew and Mark list James first ("James and Joseph and Simon and Judas," Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), probably as the oldest of the four. This would make him the second oldest of the brothers, after Jesus of course. And though James and the other brothers occasionally accompanied Jesus during his ministry, both in Galilee (John 2:12) and in Jerusalem (John 7:1–10), they did not believe in Jesus during that time (John 7:5; cf. Mark 3:13–21).

Sometime after the resurrection, however, Jesus' physical brothers believed and became his spiritual brothers. John Stott notes, "It is remarkable, therefore, that during the ten days which elapsed between the ascension and Pentecost, the brothers of the Lord are specifically mentioned by Luke as finding their place in the believing, praying company of expectant Christians (Acts 1:14)."[2] What happened? Paul sheds some light on this in his account of Jesus' resurrection appearances, stating

> . . . that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to *James*, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Cor. 15:3–8)

James witnessed not only Jesus' resurrection, but probably his ascension as well (Acts 1:1–14). James was present in the upper room after the ascension, when Matthias was selected to replace Judas as one of the twelve apostles (Acts 1:12–26). And when the day of Pentecost arrived, James was there, beholding the work of the Holy Spirit and the inauguration of a "new era

birth, some refer to James as the half-brother of Jesus. For the sake of style, however, I will refer to him simply as James, the brother of Jesus.

2. John R. W. Stott, *Men with a Message: An Introduction to the New Testament and Its Writers*, rev. Stephen Motyer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 120.

in which the eschatological life of the future invades the present evil age in a proleptic manner."[3] Further, James probably heard Peter's sermon at Pentecost and saw three thousand people come to believe in Jesus, repent of their sins, be baptized, and become a part of the new covenant community.

So it is likely that James witnessed Jesus' resurrection, became a believer, then also witnessed Jesus' ascension, the reconstitution of the Twelve, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the formation of the church! It is no wonder that James became an important leader in the early church, especially among Jewish Christians. His prominence is clear from the story of Peter being rescued from imprisonment by Herod (who had just killed James, the brother of John). Note Peter's request, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers" (Acts 12:17). That James is the one to be made aware of this indicates that he was "a major figure in the Jerusalem church."[4]

We also learn of James's stature in the early church through Paul's epistle to the Galatians. Paul refers to James as an "apostle" (Gal. 1:18–19), and, along with Peter and John, a "pillar" (Gal. 2:9). Paul viewed these three as key leaders in the Jerusalem church and met with them to discuss the gospel and his missionary strategy. Paul later described the accord: "And when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do" (Gal. 2:9–10).[5] James, Peter, and John backed Paul and his understanding of justification by faith apart from circumcision, which defended him against some influential Jewish opponents. This unity in the gospel would be displayed

3. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 57.

4. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 430.

5. Note how this theme is also prominent in the epistle of James. For more on the poor in the Jerusalem church, see Acts 4:32–35; 6:1–4; Rom. 15:25–33; 1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8–9.

as Gentile Christians shared their resources with the poor in the Jerusalem church.

Paul later discovered that Peter, himself an apostle and a pillar, had stopped eating with the Gentiles after "certain men came from James" (Gal. 2:12). As in his previous denial of Christ before the crucifixion, Peter yielded to peer pressure. This disappointed Paul, given Peter's previous vision of Cornelius (Acts 10–11) and recently stated convictions about the full inclusion of the Gentiles in the church. Who were these "certain men" who "came from James" and negatively influenced Peter? They were not necessarily the "false brothers" of Galatians 2:1–6, who pushed for the circumcision of Titus, and thus the necessity of circumcision for full inclusion in the church. Timothy George states:

> Nor should we assume that James had engineered their [the men from James's] action as a ploy to win Peter back to a more hard-line position on Gentile fellowship. Obviously these visitors felt some attachment to James, respected his leadership of the church in Jerusalem, and perhaps even carried letters of recommendation from him (cf. 2 Cor. 3:1–3). Later at the Jerusalem Council, James, writing to the believers in Antioch, referred to certain persons who "went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said" (Acts 15:24).[6]

George is right. There is no need to see these men as representing James, but only coming from Jerusalem and potentially distorting the ideas of James.[7] The biblical accounts display an overall unity between Paul and James, even as they faced radically different contexts and concerns.

Acts 15 is also significant in this respect, recounting the important role that James played in the early church. The theo-

6. Timothy George, *Galatians*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 175; cf. 128–202.

7. This is interesting and ironic. As we will see later, some interpret James 2:14–26 as a response to a misunderstanding or distortion of Paul's teachings (sometimes called "Paulinism"), and Paul here in Galatians may be correcting a distortion of James's teachings (shall we call this "Jacobeanism"?).

logical and missiological concerns raised by Paul in Galatians 1 had been brewing and finally came to a head. Some Jewish leaders maintained that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Paul and Barnabas opposed those leaders and their views and "were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders" and address this question (15:2). At this so-called "Jerusalem Council," Paul and Barnabas declared how God had genuinely converted Gentiles. Some Jewish believers opposed Paul and Barnabas and their conclusions. After much debate among the apostles and elders, Peter delivered a powerful case for God's acceptance of the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas testified again, and then James spoke:

> Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. . . . Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues. (Acts 15:13–21)

In this speech, James spoke authoritatively ("listen to me") and showed his support of Peter, even highlighting his Jewish name, Simeon. James explained that God had visited the Gentiles and called them as his people. James pointed to Amos 9:11–12 to remind the assembly how God had promised a future restoration, which included gathering a remnant of his people together. That remnant included the Gentiles. This had all happened because the Messiah has come. The arrival of the Holy Spirit confirmed that the new age had dawned and that the Gentiles were included, just as the prophets had previously announced. The present people of God stood in continuity with Israel, but extended also to the Gentiles. What appeared to be new was "really an old promise."[8] I. H. Marshall explains:

8. Bock, *Acts*, 505. Paul later echoed this emphasis (cf. Rom. 15:7–13).

> The point would seem to be that God is doing something new in raising up the church; it is an event of the last days, and therefore the old rules of the Jewish religion no longer apply: God is making a people out of the nations and nothing in the text suggests they should become Jews in order to become God's people. So there are no entrance "conditions" to be imposed upon them.[9]

James asserted that the Gentiles must not be burdened with Jewish regulations, but out of respect and cultural sensitivity should refrain from certain matters (15:20).[10] Following James's speech, the apostles and elders commissioned a letter to the Gentile believers, stating essentially what James had just asserted.

James's leadership role among the Jewish Christians was significant. He seemed to serve as the chair at the Jerusalem Council, his conclusions regarding the controversy won the day, and his insightful speech solidified the council's decision.

Acts 21:17–26 portrays another episode involving Paul and James. Paul and Luke arrived in Jerusalem and went to see James and the elders. Paul told them stories of what God had done among the Gentiles. Upon hearing the stories, James and the elders glorified God (21:20). But they also informed Paul that many Jewish Christians had been hearing false reports of Paul's teaching and ministry. The word on the street was that Paul had been undermining the law by telling Jewish Christians neither to circumcise their children nor to follow traditional customs. So James and the elders encouraged Paul to go into the temple and publicly perform the rites of purification, which would help silence the rumors and demonstrate his commitment to the law. At their request, Paul did so.

Acts 21 also sheds light on James, Paul, and their relationship. For example, it shows how people misinterpreted Paul's teaching

9. I. H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 253; see also Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 348, 501, 518–19.

10. Paul later reflected the same concerns (cf. Rom. 14:1–15:7). In German, such limitations for the purpose of cultural sensitivity are known as *Jakobsklausen*, or "James clauses" (Bock, *Acts*, 507).

concerning the law. Paul preached that justification was by faith in Christ, not by the works of the law. But many Jewish Christians construed Paul to be teaching that the law was unimportant. Paul taught that circumcision was not necessary for salvation, but he was rumored to be teaching Jewish Christians not to circumcise their children.

Acts 21 also shows the ministry context in Jerusalem (21:20–21). Paul was preaching the gospel to Gentiles and declaring that they could be saved apart from the Jewish works of the law. James was preaching the gospel to Jews and needed to show how Christianity is consistent with, the extension of, and the climax of the law and its teachings. These contextual differences are quite significant to our interpretation of Paul and James. Paul held a high view of the law, but stressed that salvation comes in union with Christ and his saving work, is initiated by and brought about by God's grace, and is received by faith—not through circumcision, eating the right food, keeping the Sabbath, or performing good deeds. Neither being Jewish nor keeping the law brought about salvation. God did. And because of this, Gentiles were to be received as equal members of the people of God.

Thankfully, Paul and his theology have received so much attention that his context and emphasis are now often understood (though there is dispute regarding the details). The same cannot be said for James, however, as his writing and contexts are often overlooked. James wrote to help Jewish Christians understand how the coming of the Messiah inaugurated the new age, and how this should shape their understanding of salvation, the law, the Gentiles, the covenant, and the people of God. James had the monumental task of showing how Christianity is the extension and the fulfillment of Judaism, and how this was articulated by the prophets of old. He led the Jerusalem church at a time when the city was tense with rising Jewish nationalism, political unrest, and Roman occupation. Jewish Christians were likely taking flack from the Romans on one side and Jewish loyalists on the other. James and the Jerusalem church did not share the traditional, anti-Gentile

spirit. Instead, they were caught in the middle, trying to relate to and evangelize Jews and yet support and defend the Gentile mission. That is why James made the purification request of Paul, and that is why Paul, himself passionate about the salvation of the Jews (cf. Rom. 1:16–17; 9:1–6; 10:1), humbled himself and complied. Both James and Paul desired to show that Paul was a "loyal Jew and that outreach to the Gentiles is not anti-Jewish."[11]

Contrary to scholars like F. C. Baur, the New Testament portrays Paul and James as preserving remarkable harmony, given their different needs and contexts. There were tensions from time to time, but too much has been made of this. Neither Paul nor Luke was afraid to point out the messiness of leadership and the friction that often results when strong personalities are involved. Yet the biblical accounts reveal that both James and Paul guarded the gospel of grace, and they did it in unity.

Further, both James and Paul employed wise cross-cultural strategies. Because most Christians are Gentiles today, we tend to read their accounts and assume that Paul was the one sacrificing for the good of the whole. He definitely was, and much can be learned from that. But we should also realize that James was paying a high price for defending the gospel, Paul, and the Gentile mission. James and the Jerusalem church had to live in Jerusalem after Paul moved on to the next city. They had to address the misunderstandings multiplied by gossip and riots. Their credibility with local Jewish loyalists kept getting weaker, which inevitably made their evangelism of the Jews more difficult. It also became harder to keep Jewish Christians from being confused by the clamor. Marshall puts it well: "We probably underestimate what a colossal step it was for dyed-in-the-wool Jewish legalists to adopt a new way of thinking. Moreover, it is possible that nationalist pressure was increasing in Judea, and that Christians were having to tread carefully to avoid being thought of as disloyal to their Jewish heritage."[12]

11. Bock, *Acts*, 643.
12. Marshall, *Acts*, 249.

Beyond these biblical accounts, the information on James is sketchy and based on various reports by early historians.[13] They mention that he was the first "bishop" of Jerusalem, was nicknamed "James the Just" because of his devotion to prayer and faithfulness to the law, and was martyred in Jerusalem in AD 62. Josephus recounts that James was highly regarded by the people of Jerusalem, but feared and hated by the priestly aristocracy that ruled the city. The high priest, Ananius, had James brought before the Sanhedrin, tried, and stoned.[14]

Why is this James, the brother of Jesus, likely to have been the author of this letter? First, as we will see below, he is the only viable James mentioned in the New Testament. Second, the testimony of the ancient church supports this.[15] Third, the Greek contains striking similarities to the speech and letter by James recorded in Acts 15:13–21, 23–29. Moo maintains:

> The epistolary "greeting" (*chairein*) occurs in James 1:1 and Acts 15:23, but only one other time in the New Testament; the use of name (*onoma*) as the subject of the passive verb "call" (*kaleo*) is peculiar, yet occurs both in James 2:7 and Acts 15:17; the appeal "listen, my brothers" is found both in James 2:5 and Acts 15:13; and there are other slight similarities. These parallels are certainly not numerous enough to provide proof of common origin, yet they are suggestive when taken in conjunction with the first two points.[16]

Fourth, the Jewish flavor of the epistle is consistent with what we know about James, the brother of Jesus. The Old Testament allusions, the proverbial nature of the wisdom sections, the prophetic style of admonitions, the reference to the synagogue, and

13. See Matti Myllykoski, "James the Just in History and Tradition: Perspectives of Past and Present Scholarship (Part I)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 5, no. 1 (2006): 73–122; idem, "James the Just in History and Tradition: Perspectives of Past and Present Scholarship (Part II)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 6, no. 1 (2007): 11–98.

14. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church and the World*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 121–23; cf. D. H. Little, "The Death of James the Brother of Jesus" (PhD diss., Rice University, 1971).

15. Moo, *James*, TNTC, 22.

16. Ibid., 22.

the strong monotheistic emphasis all resonate with the biblical accounts of this James. Fifth, the teachings of Jesus, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, are strikingly reflected in this letter. This too would be appropriate from a brother of Jesus who was with him during certain parts of his earthly ministry. Sixth, James's leadership position in the early Jewish Christian church would have made it natural for him to address authoritatively the needs and concerns of "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (1:1). Finally, central themes in the epistle like the poor and suffering/persecution are characteristic of the other biblical portraits of the concerns of James, the brother of Jesus.

Another James or an Unknown Christian Leader?

Some scholars have suggested that another James or an unknown Christian leader in the early church was the author of the epistle. Three arguments stand out.

First, it is hard for some to believe that the brother of Jesus would not have mentioned, or at least alluded to, that relationship in the letter. Such a relationship would have bolstered his authority with the churches.

Second, the language and cultural background of the epistle are sometimes seen as inconsistent with the author being the brother of Jesus. Ralph Martin comments:

> Aside from the issue of direct authorship, the most secure conclusion is that this document—whether in epistolary form or not—betrays a debt to the literary conventions and idioms of Hellenistic Judaism. It may have some connection with James in Jerusalem; but its final author, whether as redactor or amanuensis, was well versed in the bilingual vocabulary and writing techniques of the Roman provinces.[17]

Though not personally holding to this view, Moo states the argument clearly: "James is written in idiomatic Hellenistic Greek,

17. Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), lxx.

with some literary flourishes (cf. the incomplete hexameter in 1:17), and occasionally employs language derived from Greek philosophy and religion (e.g., 'the cycle of nature' in 3:6)."[18]

Third, some suggest that the theological use of law in the epistle varies from the heavy commitment to the law found in James, the brother of Jesus. The epistle depicts the law as "the law of liberty" (1:25; 2:12) and "the royal law" (2:8) and focuses on the moral law, with no mention of the ceremonial law. This, it is argued, does not fit together well with Jesus' brother's emphasis on the law, including his stress on its ceremonial and ritual aspects.[19]

What then are the alternative suggestions? A few argue that the epistle was written pseudonymously (written under the false name of James by an individual or a community in the tradition of James for the purpose of gaining authority and/or extending his teachings). Peter Davids dismantles that hypothesis: "Against the theory of pseudonymous authorship stands the simplicity of the greeting, the lack of exalted titles ('brother of the Lord,' 'elder in Jerusalem,' or 'apostle of Christ'); for a pseudonymous author would most likely identify his James better and would stress his authority."[20] Terry Wilder also makes a strong case that "the extant documentary evidence indicates that the early church did not accept pseudonymity. When discovered, it was soundly rejected."[21]

Others propose that the author could have been another James mentioned in the New Testament, or one who went unmentioned, since James (*Iakobos*) was a common name. The New

18. Moo, *James*, TNTC, 24–25.

19. Martin, *James*, lxx–lxxi. For an assessment of these arguments, see Moo, *James*, TNTC, 23–28.

20. Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 9.

21. Terry L. Wilder, J. Daryl Charles, and Kendell Easley, *Faithful to the End: An Introduction to Hebrews through Revelation* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 59; cf. Terry L. Wilder, "Pseudonymity and the New Testament," in *Interpreting the New Testament*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 296–335. James D. G. Dunn disagrees. See his "Pseudepigraphy" in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 977–84.

Testament records at least three distinct men named James, besides Jesus' brother.

First, there was James, the son of Zebedee, who became a follower of Christ near the outset of Christ's ministry (Mark 1:19). One of the twelve disciples, this James was often mentioned with his brother John, and was a member of Jesus' inner circle (with John and Peter). He was beheaded at the command of Herod Agrippa I in AD 44 (Acts 12:1–2).

A second James was the son of Alphaeus. He too was one of the twelve disciples and receives mention only in Mark 3:18 (unless he is James the "lesser," or "younger," referenced in Mark 15:40; cf. Matt. 27:56).[22]

There was a third James, who was the father of Judas. This Judas, not the infamous Judas Iscariot (John 14:22), is listed as one of the twelve disciples (Luke 6:16; cf. Acts 1:13; called "Thaddaeus" in Matt. 10:3 and Mark 3:18).

These alternatives, however, are problematic. James, the brother of John, was martyred in AD 44, and it is highly unlikely that this letter was written before then. Most scholars also reject the latter two candidates because they would have needed to identify themselves better if "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" were expected to submit to their authority. Is it possible that another James penned this epistle? Yes. Is that the strongest position? No. The traditional view makes much more sense of the evidence.

Teaching from James, the Brother of Jesus, and Later Redaction?

The third major approach to the authorship of James is the two-stage development view, which holds that James, Jesus' brother, is responsible for the teachings of the letter, but that the letter itself may have been composed by another person or a Christian community. This view exists in various forms. Scholars who defend a two-stage development view include Ralph Martin and Peter Davids.

22. Moo, *James*, TNTC, 19.

Martin suggests that the letter originated with the teaching of James, the brother of Jesus, who was martyred in approximately AD 62. Then, after the Jewish War of AD 66–70, the community of which James had been a part left Palestine and settled in Syria. There they continued to follow the teachings of James, refined them, and created a letter, the epistle we know as James, to address a pressing pastoral problem.[23]

Davids maintains that some of the material in James points to an early date, between AD 40 and the Jerusalem Council (approximately AD 50). He supports this from the author's self-designation, the strong Jewish influence, the use of a preliterary tradition of the words of Jesus, and the lack of a developed Christology. Yet Davids also finds evidence of a later date from the Greek idiom, the contextual factors that would occasion such strong teaching on poverty and wealth, and some similarities to the Apostolic Fathers. He theorizes that the teachings of James, the brother of Jesus, stand behind the source material, but that he received assistance in the editing of this material, either during his lifetime or perhaps after his death, as the church spread beyond Jerusalem and began to use Greek more exclusively.[24]

The two-stage development view is much stronger than the "another James" view. It is possible, but unnecessary. It is helpful, however, in that it underscores that James, the brother of Jesus, stands behind this epistle and its teachings.

The Churches and Their Problems

Date

If James, the brother of Jesus, is the author of this letter, then it was written before AD 62, the date of James's martyrdom. The lack of references to issues surrounding the Jerusalem Council (e.g., law, Gentiles, kosher food, etc.) may point to a date prior to the Jerusalem Council (approximately AD 50). The

23. Martin, *James*, lxvii–lxxvii.
24. Davids, *James*, 22.

references to severe poverty would especially make sense if the letter of James was written after the famine in Jerusalem in AD 46 (Acts 11:28). This would also coincide with initial versions of the social, political, and religious upheavals that culminated in the Jewish war of rebellion in AD 66–70.[25] This early date also seems consistent with the strong emphasis on the traditions of Jesus' teaching, with the church depicted as "synagogue," and the letter's dependence on Jewish sources.[26] Thus, a date between AD 46 and 49 is tentatively proposed. If this is correct, James might be the earliest written of the books to be included in the New Testament.

The Churches/Recipients

Although a detailed explanation of the historical situation and audience cannot be found in James, the letter does provide some information about the audience, sometimes explicitly, but most often implicitly. One characteristic is clear: the recipients were primarily, if not exclusively, Jewish Christians. This seems clear from James 1:1 as well as regular references to Jewish institutions and beliefs. These Christians also met in a synagogue (2:2) with elders (5:14). Their God is immutably holy (1:13–15), one (2:19), and the unique judge and lawgiver (4:12). James refers to Abraham, Rahab, and Elijah. He expects his readers to understand the Old Testament image of the marriage relationship as representing the covenant between God and his people (4:4).

Where did these Jewish Christians live? James 1:1 addresses "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion." I. H. Marshall observes that while this is a Christian letter to Christians, "the writer here takes up the tradition of Jewish leaders writing to Jewish people living in exile from their homeland and exposed to the difficulties and trials of this situation."[27] Most scholars interpret this literally, as refer-

25. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 25–27 (hereafter abbreviated as Moo, *James*, PNTC).

26. Ibid., 26.

27. I. H. Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 628.

ring to Jewish Christians who were scattered among the nations. Others point out that this phrase was used in intertestamental Judaism as a reference to the true people of God in the last days (cf. 1 Peter 1:1). It is possible that these Jewish Christians were located in Palestine and given this label as an encouragement to stand firm through trials because of the eschatological hope they possessed. But more likely they were Jewish Christians literally scattered among the nations.[28]

From where would a letter to scattered or exiled Jewish Christians likely come? Richard Bauckham aptly answers: "A letter to the Diaspora must come from Jerusalem. A Christian letter to the Diaspora could come from no one more appropriately than from James."[29] He adds that along with Peter and Paul, "James was one of the three most influential leaders in the first generation of the Christian movement."[30] This is in part because the Jerusalem church functioned for many as the mother church, as central and authoritative. With their heritage of acknowledging Jerusalem and its temple, Jewish Christians may have thought of the Jerusalem church as more lofty than we might think of it. Moreover, the Jerusalem church not only played a part in the conversion of many of the scattered Jewish Christians, but also sent out many missionaries and would have received many who came back to Jerusalem for the festivals.

From the depiction in 1:1, the letter from James in Jerusalem appears to be an encyclical, that is, one sent to a number of churches. Bauckham makes a compelling case for this, and critiques James Adamson's comparison of James to 1 Corinthians because it overstates the occasional nature of James. If it is an encyclical, Bauckham argues, everything stated in the letter is intentionally vague and hypothetical. While Bauckham is right

28. For more on the twelve tribes in the Diaspora, see Robert W. Wall, "James, Letter of," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Martin and Davids, 548–51; cf. P. R. Trebilco, "Diaspora Judaism," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Martin and Davids, 287–300.

29. Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (London: Routledge, 1999), 16.

30. Ibid.

to warn against too meticulous a reconstruction of an occasion, he goes too far when he asserts, "It is unlikely to have been occasioned by any specific exigencies."[31]

I believe that James writes in a particular context to address specific needs of the Diaspora churches. Marshall captures the tension: "We thus have the paradox that the writer appears to be writing to a very broad audience, the Christians scattered among the nations, and yet seems to have a very specific congregation or congregations in view."[32] I suggest that James writes his letter because he knows these churches and wants to address their real needs. Even an encyclical is written out of a context, to a context, and for a purpose.

The recipients were part of local congregations (2:2) with teachers (3:1) and elders (5:14). These Jewish Christians were experiencing significant trials (1:2–4) and serious oppression (2:6; 5:1–11). Some in their ranks were claiming they had faith, but they had little concern for personal holiness (1:22–25; 4:4) and failed to assist the poor or the marginalized (1:26–27; 2:1–13, 14–26). The congregations included others who wanted to be viewed as teachers, but were unworthy (3:1–12). Such people were quarrelsome, creating factions rather than peace (3:13–4:10). While these are common problems facing churches, James's consistent emphasis on a few themes, coupled with his impassioned arguments, suggests that these were issues already encountered by these churches. Further, James's attitude and message hardly lead anyone to conclude that these churches were healthy. A hypothetical encyclical would not be as negative as this epistle, or would include more positives along the way (would not some of the churches be healthy?).

What can be made of the socio-economic level of the recipients? Since the letter is probably an encyclical, this would vary to some extent, though the cultural norms would often prevail from church to church. James 1:9–11 refers to "the lowly brother" who will ultimately be exalted. This suggests recipients who were low on the socio-economic scale. Yet 2:1–13 evaluates how these

31. Ibid., 25–28.
32. Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 629.

recipients have treated the rich who attend their assembly in comparison to those who come and are poor with "shabby clothing." Some in the church gave preferential treatment to the rich and dishonored the poor, which was particularly absurd since most of them were poor (2:6). The recipients were generally able to meet the needs of those fellow church members who were poorly clothed and in need of daily food (2:14–26). From this it appears that there was a certain minority in the churches that had major financial needs, but also a larger group that was not severely poor. The majority at least had decent clothes and daily food, and even enough resources to help their fellow believers.

More information about the recipients comes from 4:13: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.'" Such an exhortation makes little sense unless there were at least some in the congregations who were merchants. James also addresses the rich in 1:9–11 and 5:1–6, and from this some have concluded that the congregations must have included wealthy landowners. That is highly improbable since James depicts such people suffering future punishment in hell. Instead, James uses a rhetorical style reminiscent of some of the Old Testament prophets and condemns the rich outside the fellowship.

This reconstruction of the audience suggests that there are four distinct groups referred to in this epistle: (1) the poor (the majority in this believing community), (2) the severely poor (those without decent clothes and often in need of daily food), (3) the merchants (those tempted to be overconfident in their plans), and (4) the wealthy landowners (those exploiting the poor).[33] The congregations were primarily composed of the first three groups, with the majority being in the first category.

33. More than one hundred years before the writing of James, the Roman general Pompey conquered Judean territory and left many Jewish peasants without land. Later the extreme taxation by Herod the Great drove more small farmers out of business. The result was that in the first century many peasants worked as tenants on large estates while others became day laborers, hoping to find good work and often finding it only around harvesttime. Resentment against aristocratic owners was significant and often deserved. See Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 688.

In sum, it seems best to conclude that James, the brother of Jesus, wrote from Jerusalem around AD 46–49 to churches he knew, in order to address their needs. These churches were composed primarily of Jewish Christians who were working poor. These churches faced challenges from the outside (oppression from the rich) and turmoil on the inside (lack of love for the extreme poor, political power plays for leadership roles, disunity, slander against one another, etc.).

The Epistle and Its Characteristics

Language and Style

Most scholars agree that James was written in a fairly elevated form of literary Koine Greek. Davids remarks:

> This can be concluded from a host of observations: the use of subordination (with conjunctions) and participial constructions rather than coordination, the careful control of word order (e.g., the placing of the stressed object before the verb, the separation of correlated sentence elements for emphasis as in 1:2; 3:3, 8; 5:10), the relative lack of barbarisms and anacolutha [i.e., an abrupt change in grammatical structure], the use of the gnomic aorist (1:11, 24), and choice of vocabulary. . . . All of these point to a developed literary ability.[34]

James is also characterized by an unusual vocabulary. One estimate is that James contains 63 *hapax legomena* (words found only once in the New Testament). Thirteen of these 63 appear in James for the first time in Greek, while 45 are found in the Septuagint, a pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament.[35]

James also uses many Semitisms. Some examples of Hebrew influence on his style include the use of the passive to avoid stating God's name (1:5; 5:15) and parallelism (1:9, 11, 13; 4:8–9;

34. Davids, *James*, 58.
35. Ibid., 58–59.

5:4). Further evidence of Jewish background is provided by the fact that the believers gather in the synagogue (2:2), acknowledge Abraham as their "father" (2:21), and know God as "the Lord of hosts" (5:4, the only time this name is used in the New Testament). At a bare minimum, the thought-world of James incorporates Jewish concepts and ideas.

In addition, James employs many analogies. He writes of waves driven and tossed by the sea (1:6), withering plants (1:10–11), looking into a mirror (1:23), a dead body (2:26), bridling of a horse (3:3), a rudder turning a ship (3:4), a forest fire (3:5–6), taming wild beasts (3:7), the absurd fountain of fresh and bitter water (3:11), the absurd vine of grapes and figs (3:12), the vanishing vapor (4:14), clothes eaten by moths (5:2), and farmers waiting for the harvest (5:7).[36]

One striking literary feature is James's use of hook words or phrases that link together clauses and sentences.[37] For example, patience (1:3–4), maturity (1:4–5), asking (1:5–6), testing/temptation (1:12–14), lust (1:14–15), and anger (1:19–20) are used in this way.

Form

As is evident from James 1:1, the genre of James is *epistle*. It opens with an address that mentions its author, its recipients, and the general occasion.

Although James is primarily an epistle, other literary forms can be detected. For example, James is also *paraenesis* (exhortation). Paraenesis is "a genre of ancient moral literature characterized by various collections of moral sayings and essays, loosely held together by common themes and linking catchwords but without literary rhyme, theological reason or specific spatial location."[38] Its dominant mood is imperative, and the primary exhortation is to live virtuously. It often points to

36. Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997), 24.

37. This is called duadiplosis or paronomasia.

38. Wall, "James," 551.

moral truth that all should accept and heroic examples that all should imitate.[39]

James in some ways also bears the imprints of oral composition. The material may originally have been a collection of *sermons* by James later put into writing as a letter under his authority and oversight.[40] Various elements in James not only demonstrate the author's literary skill, but also his accomplished rhetorical style and oral composition. This is seen in James's overall flow and rhythm, along with the particular usage of paronomasia (1:1–2), parechesis (1:24), alliteration (1:2), rhyme (1:6), and similarity in word sounds (3:17). There are also several indications of an oral style in James: relatively short sentence structure, frequent use of the imperative (49 times in 108 verses), forms of direct address (17 occurrences of the vocative, primarily "brothers"), vivid examples, personification (1:15, 23), simile (1:6, 10–11; 5:7), rhetorical questions (2:6–7, 14, 17; 4:1, 5), and negative terms (2:20; 4:4, 8). Davids concludes, "All of these examples together show that despite its careful literary crafting, the letter partakes of the characteristics of oral rather than written discourse."[41]

Structure

The epistle's structure, or lack thereof, often takes center stage in academic discussions. Some find little or no literary strategy and structure. Reformer Martin Luther supposed that James threw things together chaotically.[42] Martin Dibelius proposed that James has minimal structure and is primarily paraenesis, a collection of exhortations loosely strung together.[43] Others, however, note structure and progression. Following the trajectory of

39. See Matt. A. Jackson-McCabe, "A Letter to the Twelve Tribes in the Diaspora: Wisdom and 'Apocalyptic' Eschatology in the Letter of James," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 35 (1996): 504–17.

40. C. L. Church, "A Forschungsgeschichte on the Literary Character of the Epistle of James" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990), 255–61.

41. Davids, *James*, 58.

42. Timothy George, "'A Right Strawy Epistle': Reformation Perspectives on James," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 20–31.

43. Martin Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, rev. Heinrich Greeven, Hermeneia Commentary (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 1–11.

Fred Francis, Davids argues that James is a "carefully constructed work."[44] Finally, some like Moo proffer that James displays key motifs that are replayed and interwoven throughout the letter, but that his structure is not as neat as some suggest.[45]

Many of the best proposals suggest that James has a thematic introduction in some part of chapter 1, and then develops those themes throughout. Robert Wall, for instance, proposes that 1:1–21 functions as a thematic introduction, centered around 1:19, which is developed in 1:22–2:26 as the wisdom of "quick to hear," in 3:1–18 as the wisdom of "slow to speak," in 4:1–5:6 as the wisdom of "slow to anger," with 5:7–20 being concluding exhortations.[46]

Davids suggests that James begins with an opening statement (1:2–27), which includes the primary themes unpacked in the remainder of the epistle. Davids sees 2:1–26 as developing the theme of 1:9–11 and 1:22–25: the excellence of poverty and generosity; 3:1–4:12 as developing the theme of 1:5–8 and 1:19–21: the demand for pure speech; 4:13–5:6 as developing the theme of 1:2–4 and 1:12–18: testing through wealth. Davids agrees with Wall that 5:7–20 constitutes a closing statement.[47]

This approach to structure seems promising, though I tend to think that using 1:26–27 as the governing text in the opening statement makes the most sense out of James. It highlights themes of consistency, genuine faith, words, mercy to the fragile, and keeping oneself from the world.

Moo organizes an outline around one key theme: spiritual wholeness. He puts forward the following structure: address and greeting (1:1); pursuit of spiritual wholeness: trials (1:2–18); evidence of wholeness: obedience to the word (1:19–2:26); community dimension of wholeness: pure speech and peace, part 1 (3:1–4:3); summons to wholeness (4:4–10); community dimension

44. Davids, *James*, 25; cf. Fred. O. Francis, "The Form and Function of the Opening and Closing Paragraphs of James and 1 John," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 61 (1970): 110–26.

45. Moo, *James*, PNTC, 45.

46. Wall, "James, Letter of," 557–59.

47. Davids, *James*, 22–29.

of wholeness: pure speech and peace, part 2 (4:11–12); worldview of wholeness: understanding time and eternity (4:13–5:11); concluding exhortations (5:12–20).[48]

The best recent proposal for James's structure comes from Mark Taylor and George Guthrie:[49]

1:1 The Opening of the Letter
1:2–27 Double Introduction: Living by Righteous Wisdom
  1:2–11 Handling Trials with Righteous Wisdom
    1:2–4 The Spiritual Benefit of Trials
    1:5–8 The Need for Righteous Wisdom
    1:9–11 Wise Attitudes for the Rich and Poor
  1:12 Overlapping Transition: Blessings for Those Who Persevere under Trial
  1:13–27 The Perils of Self-Deception
    1:13–15 Temptation's True Nature
    1:16–19a Do Not Be Deceived: God Gives the Word
    1:19b–21 Righteous Living through the Word
    1:22–25 Do Not Be Deceived: Be Doers of the Word
    1:26–27 Transition: Self-Deception Regarding Speaking and Acting
2:1–5:6 Living the "Law of Liberty"
  A 2:1–11 Body Opening: Violating the Royal Law through Wrong Speaking and Acting Inappropriately toward the Poor
  B 2:12–13 So Speak and So Act as One Being Judged by the Law of Liberty

48. Moo, *James*, PNTC, vi–vii, 43–46.

49. Mark E. Taylor and George H. Guthrie, "The Structure of James," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68 (2006): 681–705; cf. Mark E. Taylor, "Recent Scholarship on the Structure of James," *Currents in Biblical Research* 3 (2004): 86–115; idem, *A Text-linguistic Investigation into the Discourse Structure of James* (London: T & T Clark, 2006); Luke L. Cheung, *The Genre, Composition, and Hermeneutics of James* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2003).

C 2:14–3:12 Wrong Acting and Speaking in Community

C1 2:14–26 Wrong Actions toward the Poor

C2 3:1–12 Wrong Speaking

D 3:13–18 RIGHTEOUS VS. WORLDLY WISDOM

CA 4:1–10 Prophetic Rebuke: A Call to Humility and Repentance

CA1 4:1–5 Rebuke of the Community: Wrong Speaking and Acting

CA2 4:6–10 A Call to Repentance

BA 4:11–12 Do the Law, Do Not Judge It

AA 4:13–5:6 Body Closing: Twin Calls to the Arrogant Rich (Presumption/Oppression)

AA1 4:13–17 A Rebuke of Arrogant Presumption

AA2 5:1–6 Judgment on the Arrogant Rich

5:7–20 Conclusion: Enduring in Righteous Living in Community

5:7–11 The Need for Patient Endurance

5:12 *Transition: An Exhortation against Oath Taking*

5:13–20 The Need for Righteous Words in Community