

A REVIEW ARTICLE COMMENTING ON COMMENTARIES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

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For many years, perhaps because of the overriding influence of Martin Luther's prejudice toward this book, James was neglected by NT scholars. Happily, that is changing. The student of James will be tremendously aided by several fine commentaries, especially those that have been published in the last decade. During this time, there have been important contributions made at both the popular and technical levels. While no one would need all of these commentaries, each one, for various reasons, makes a valuable contribution to the study of the epistle. In this review article, we hope to assess the strengths of some of the volumes as well as note the various perspectives from which each has been written. In doing so, it is our purpose to provide guidelines for the busy pastor, teacher or student who is seeking help in the exegesis and exposition of this important NT book.

The classic work on the epistle is still the fine commentary by James B. Mayor (first published in 1913). As a full scale commentary, it is still the finest exposition available on James, even considering the recent publications. The newer volumes by Peter Davids (1982) in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* and Sophie Laws (1980) are very valuable as well. Davids' work is a masterpiece in scholarship interacting with newer and older literature, including works in German and French. He writes from an evangelical perspective and is quite creative as he weaves together the theological and literary themes of James. Laws' work is useful, but not nearly as creative. The *New International Commentary* series has replaced the older volume by A. Ross (1954) with a more thorough exposition by James Adamson (1976). Adamson's work is on the English text as is another volume by Davids (1983) in the *Good News Commentary* series. For works on the Greek text, in addition to Mayor and Davids (1982), the exegete will be served well with the works by W. E. Oesterley (revised 1979) in *The Expositor's Greek New Testament*, R. C. H. Lenski (1966), and the esteemed older works by F. J. A. Hort (originally published 1909) and J. H. Ropes (1916) in the *International Critical Commentary*.

Critical commentaries written from a non-evangelical perspective are Martin Dibelius (1975) in the *Hermeneia* series and Bo I. Reicke (1964) in the *Anchor Bible*. Both contain valuable insights, especially in dealing with the literary structure of the text. Reicke's work on James is meaty and his interpretation is less "individualistic" than other volumes in the Anchor Bible series. C. Leslie Mitton (1966) is especially helpful in relating the teachings of James to the teachings of Jesus.

Evangelical commentaries (in addition to Adamson and Davids) which will be helpful, especially for the busy pastor, are D. Edmond Hiebert (1979), Alec Motyer (1985) in the *Bible Speaks Today* series, Donald Burdick (1981) in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Curtis Vaughan (1969), R. V. G. Tasker (1956) in the *Tyndale* series and Vernon Doerksen (1982) in the *Everyman's Bible Commentary*.

Hiebert's exposition is warm, devotional and thorough, very typical of the work we have come to expect from him. Vaughan's work is similar, though briefer. The volume by Burdick is a nice attempt to relate the work of James to OT wisdom literature and the teachings of Jesus. Motyer's volume is very practical and will be of great value in sermon preparation.

Lesser known volumes that have been recently reprinted include Rudolf Stier (1982) and Thomas Manton (1983). These volumes, generally Reformed in theological perspective, are devotionally rich. They tend to go beyond the meaning of the text at times in both devotional and theological reflection. They have tendencies to be verbose when briefer explanation would have been preferred.

The preacher will find nice practical-homiletical works on James which are beneficial and rewarding. For illustrative and preaching material, the choices are many. Included among these are Guy King (1941), Frank Gaebelien (1955), A. T. Robertson (1958), W. A. Criswell (1975), Warren Wiersbe (1978) and Gene Getz (1983-84).

The choices are many and one must consider matters of theological perspective, exegetical insights, expositional thoroughness and economy when seeking to purchase volumes on this most practical epistle. For balance in all areas, one would do well to have available Mayor, Davids, Motyer, Adamson and Hiebert. One should also keep an eye out for the forthcoming volume on James in the *Word Biblical Commentary* by Ralph P. Martin. Also, a new volume in the *Tyndale Series* by Douglas Moo of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School will replace the older volume by Tasker. If they are typical of the quality and style of previous volumes in these series, they will be welcomed additions.

Commentary on the Epistle of James, by James B. Adamson. NIC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.

The Letter of James and Peter, by William Barclay. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958.

"James," by Donald Burdick in Vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelien. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.

- Expository Sermons on the Epistle of James*, by W. A. Criswell. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.
- Commentary on James*, by Peter Davids. NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- James: A Good News Commentary*, by Peter Davids. GNC; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983.
- James*, by Martin Dibelius, translated by Michael A. Williams. Hermeneia: Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975.
- James*, by Vernon Doerksen. EBC; Chicago: Moody, 1983.
- The Epistle of James*, by Burton Scott Easton, IB; New York: Abingdon, 1957.
- The Practical Epistle of James*, by Frank E. Gaebelien. New York: Daniger and Raughley, 1955.
- Doing Your Part When You'd Rather Let God Do It All (James 2-5)*, by Gene Getz. Glendale: Regal, 1984.
- The Measure of a Christian (James 1)*, by Gene Getz. Glendale: Regal, 1983.
- The Epistle of James: Tests of a Living Faith*, by D. Edmond Hiebert. Chicago: Moody, 1979.
- The Epistle of St. James and The First Epistle of St. Peter*. by F. J. A. Hort. Minneapolis: Klock and Klock (reprint, 1976).
- A Belief that Behaves*, by Guy King. London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1941.
- The Epistle of James*, by Sophie Laws. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980.
- The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James*, by R. C. H. Lenski. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966.
- James*, by Ralph P. Martin. WBC; Waco: Word, forthcoming.
- James*, by Thomas Manton. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, reprint 1983.
- The Epistle of St. James*, by Joseph B. Mayor. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, revised, 1954.
- The Epistle of James*, by C. Leslie Mitton. Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1966.
- The General Epistle of James, Peter and Jude*, by James Moffatt. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928.
- The General Epistle of James*, by Douglas Moo: Tyndale; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming.
- The Message of James: The Tests of Faith*, by Alec Motyer. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985.
- "The General Epistle of James," by W. E. Oesterley, in Vol. 4 of *The Expositor's Greek New Testament*, edited by W. R. Nicoll. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint, 1979.
- Epistles of James, I and II Peter, Jude*, by B. I. Reicke. AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964.
- Studies in the Epistle of James*, by A. T. Robertson. Nashville: Broadman, 1958.
- A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, by James Hardy Ropes. ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1916,
- Commentary on the Epistle of James*, by Rudolf E. Stier. Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, reprint 1982.

The General Epistle of James, by R. V. G. Tasker. Tyndale; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956.

James: A Study Guide, by Curtis Vaughan. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969.

Be Mature, by Warren Wiersbe. Wheaton: Victor, 1978.

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