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 \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{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.


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 Gaebelein (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 James, by Peter Davids. NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.


James, by Vernon Doerksen. EBC; Chicago: Moody, 1983.

The Epistle of James, by Burton Scott Easton, IB; New York: Abingdon, 1957.


James, by Ralph P. Martin. WBC; Waco: Word, forthcoming.


Epistles of James, I and II Peter, Jude, by B. I. Reicke. AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964.


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