

Dr. David Bauer, Inductive Bible Study, Lecture 9, The Book of James

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This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 9, Book Survey, James.

We're ready to move on to the survey of the book of James. Now we've done the survey of Jude. I wanted to use Jude as a sample survey because Jude is a little more, maybe a little easier to work with, a little more helpful in terms of serving as an example for the method of book survey.

James is a little more involved, but having worked through Jude, I think we're ready to go ahead and tackle the book of James. Let me say to those of you who are watching now that you may want to pause this and actually read through James, do the same kind of thing with James that we suggested you do with Jude. That is to say to read through the book and try your hand at making survey sorts of observations and moves in James, and then come back and compare what you found with what I'm presenting.

Now when I do present though on the various books, in this case James, I don't want in any way to give the impression that what I'm presenting is the right answer and insofar as you may see, for example, the structure of the book differently than I do, that you're wrong. It's really a matter of my presenting in a method transparent way. In a way, in other words, that tries to exemplify principles of method that we've been talking about.

But anyway, when I present, I'm presenting in a method transparent way what I found and why. And so, as I say, it's not a matter of my having the right answer, and you're being wrong if you disagree with it. That's not the case at all.

But in terms of the general materials, again, we have an epistle here, and it's quite clear that once again, although we do have some reference to people, particularly, of course, Abraham and Rahab, but also Job and Elijah, that really this is not about these people. It's not biographical in terms of general materials, in terms of the focus of the content of the book, but rather the content of the book focuses quite clearly upon ideas and especially, of course, a notion of wisdom and the like. So, the general materials, we judge to be ideological.

Here are my suggestions for the titles and possible titles for the chapters. And then, in terms of the structure of the book, identifying the main units and subunits of the book, the breakdown, and in terms of the major structural relationships operative in the book as a whole, James is a bit of a challenge in terms of breakdown. As a matter

of fact, there is no consensus among scholars regarding the linear structure of the book of James.

But once again, I'll indicate where I see it and why. I might say, though, that it is quite clear that, and it's a good idea to begin by making obvious observations, that 1:1 is an epistolary greeting or salutation. It's not clear whether we have an epistolary conclusion here at all, and if so, where it begins, but the introduction is pretty clear, at least.

And so, we have the greeting, as I'm suggesting, in 1:1. We do have in 5:19 through 20 concluding counsel, although, as we'll see when we get to the interpretation of Chapter 5, 5:19 through 20 really can be seen as tying in rather significantly with 5:12 through 18. So, it's not entirely clear that you have a significant break there, but we're suggesting that that is possible. In terms of the body of the epistle, I would tend to see the major break coming between 1:27 and 2:1. In 1:2 through 1:27, we have what we might refer to and what some have referred to as an overture to the book of James.

I describe it as declarations and instructions regarding the triumph of the Christian life over trials and temptations and over the potential for deception through the twin resources of wisdom and the Word. As I mentioned here at the bottom, talking about 1:2 through 2:7, James, it seems to me here in Chapter 1 introduces virtually all the major issues of the book in a rather general way and does so in the context of the triumph of the Christian life over trials and temptations and over the potential for deception through the twin resources of wisdom and the Word. I mentioned here that there are eight issues that James introduces in a rather general way in 1:2 through 27, which then he goes ahead and expands upon in each case in the remainder of the book, what I call the arguments and exhortations regarding challenges in the Christian life.

Wisdom is introduced in a general way in chapter 1, verses 5 through 8, and then is developed especially in 3:13 through 18. This whole business of the wealthy is introduced in a general way in 1:9 through 11, and then that is expanded upon in 2:1 through 13 and in 5:1 through 6. Actually, yes, we'll say that. We might include actually there 4:13 through 5:6, but for reasons that will become clear later, I actually do not think that the end of Chapter 4 belongs specifically to the wealthy but rather has to do with disciples or Christians who have means, but he doesn't want to refer to them as the wealthy.

He talks about divine gifts in a general way, introduces that in a general way in 1:16 through 18, and then develops that, one might say, particularizes that description, discussion in 4:1 through 10 and in 5:13 through 18. He introduces in a general way the notion of active faith in 1:19 through 25 and then expands upon that in 2:1 through 26. He introduces the issue of the tongue in 1:26 in a general way and then

expands upon that in a way that quite clearly develops what he said in 1:26 in 3:1 through 4:12. He introduces in a general way social concern, that is to say, care for the poor and the needy in 1:27 and then expands upon that in 2:1 through 26.

He introduces in a general way the issue of suffering in Chapter 1 verses 2 through 4. He picks this up again in verse 12 and then expands upon that in 5:1 through 18 and he introduces in a general way the notion of prayer in 1.5 through 8 and then expands upon that in 4.1 through 3 and in 5:13 through 18. Incidentally, it may be, as we'll see later on, that the tongue is developed not only in 3:1 through 4:12 but perhaps also in 5:12 through 18 or maybe even through 20. So, this is why I say that Chapter 1 is, I think, more general.

It's a kind of overture using a language that we borrow really from music, particularly from symphonies, where an overture often involves, you know, the tying together, the weaving together of, in a short, abbreviated fashion, tunes that will be developed more fully later in the musical composition. And that seems to be the kind of thing that you have here. So, he introduces all of these issues here with the view that we're developing each of them later within the epistle.

Well, if this is the case, then in 2:1 through 5:18, we would have three subunits. In Chapter 2, we have arguments and exhortations regarding treatment of the poor, which he then ties into and bases upon the theological discussion of faith and works. Here, the emphasis is submission to the poor with its corollary, the rejection of partiality and passivity.

Then, in 3:1 through 4:12, there are arguments and exhortations regarding the struggle against warring passions, which involves real submission to the brotherhood and a rejection of that which is harmful to others within the community, the rejection of impure speech, and of bitter jealousy. Then in 4:13 through 5:18, arguments and exhortations regarding patient submission to the sovereign will and action of God. This involves submission, of course, to the action of God and its corollary, the rejection of self-sufficiency and self-rule.

That at least is one way of understanding the composition, the flow of the argument of James. Well, in terms of major structural relationships, I mentioned already that we have a preparatory statement, a background statement in 1:1. This actually is pretty short, although it's not simply skeletal. That is to say, it does contain certain elements that you do not always find in these greetings that are significant for a background for the book.

The writer identifies himself as James in terms of person and describes his status as a servant, *doulos*, or slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. What he says with regard to the recipients here is very interesting and one must think significant for understanding really the epistle. He identifies the readers as the 12 tribes and their

location or status of the dispersion, the 12 tribes of the dispersion, and, of course, then the epistle proper.

I will not take our time to read these various questions here, but you see that I do ask questions that are pretty specifically directed towards 1:1 as a background or preparatory statement and an attempt to probe the interpretive significance of these elements within the background statement, especially, I might say, this whole business of the 12 tribes of the dispersion. I want to say a little bit later on, before we get into the actual interpretation of James, about what that might mean, that kind of designation might mean, and the significance of it. Then, in terms of a second relationship, I've already suggested that quite possibly 1.2 through 27 involve general declarations and instructions regarding the moral triumph of the Christian life over trials and temptations and over possible deceptions by means of wisdom on the one hand and the word on the other.

And we'll look at this more specifically and in more detail when we examine the survey of the segment and its interpretation. But you have the instrumental role of wisdom presented here in 1.5 through 8. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man unstable in all his ways will receive anything from the Lord. And then the instrumental role of the word in making possible, as I say, the fulfillment of these instructions regarding the moral triumph of the Christian life over trials and temptations and over possible deception is really found in 1:23 through 25. But be doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving yourselves.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror. For he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

So, both wisdom and the word are presented really as resources that will lead to the fulfillment of the kind of life that he otherwise urges here in chapter one. That's at least one way, as I say, of understanding the relationship. And of course, in 2:1 through 5:20, then, we would have the specific arguments and exhortations regarding proper Christian behavior involving treatment of the poor, struggle against warring passions, patience, submission to the sovereign will, and action of God.

But in the process, he really brings in those elements that he introduces in a general way in chapter one and develops them, as I've already tried to show, in 2:1 through

5:20. Incidentally, let me mention here something. I should mention it. This is as good a place as any to mention.

My own bias, with regard to the book survey, is to begin by doing what I've tried to do here, and that is work directly with the text, do what we can in terms of structural analysis as best we can with a direct study of the text and, you know, all the rest too, including identifying higher critical data and the like from a direct study of the text, sticking just with the text, not going to secondary sources as we do the survey. But my bias then is immediately coming off the survey insofar as you have access to resources. And I know that some of you may not have access to these kinds of resources, but insofar as you have access to resources, immediately go ahead and read one or two or three discussions of kind of introductions to the book.

And I'm going to say more about this a little bit later on in terms of the resources that can be used, but the default resource for this kind of thing is New Testament introductions, whose purpose and focus is to discuss background issues and even the structure of the various biblical books. And it's really a way then of engaging in a conversation with scholarship, a conversation between what you yourself have found in your direct study of the text through the survey and what they say with regard to it. Now, one of the things that you'll find if you do that with James is that there are at least several scholars who point out that it was rather a characteristic of epistolography, of epistle writing in the Greco-Roman world and in the Jewish world, too, during the first century, to begin by presenting major themes of a book in a general way at the beginning and then to develop those themes later on within the book.

And so, Luke Timothy Johnson, for example, who has a very helpful discussion on the structure of James, talks about this being the kind of thing that first century readers would have expected, would have been looking for. And therefore, although this kind of thing may not seem so obvious to modern people, it would have been much more obvious to first century folks who had this kind of reading expectation, this kind of structural expectation with regard to epistles at the time. Not that every epistle, matter of fact, is clearly the case that not every New Testament epistle is structured this way, but this was often the way epistles were structured, and so people were kind of, one might say, geared toward seeing this kind of thing and recognizing it, even if in our eyes it may not be so obvious on the surface.

Well, a further structural feature that we have here, and once again, I raise questions with regard to all of this, all of these things, but a further structural relationship that we might very well have is a recurrence of causation and substantiation, and it's a specific kind of recurrence of causation and substantiation that we often have in epistolary material or even more broadly in discursive material. It involves a constant going back and forth between the imperative and the indicative, and we call this a hortatory. Pardon me for the typo there; I didn't catch the hortatory pattern.

Hortatory, of course, comes from the word exhortation, which means command, and it refers exactly to this kind of thing.

Repeatedly, theological declarations cause, that is to say, lead to exhortations, and sometimes a movement is from cause, theological declaration to effect, exhortation, and at other times, it is from effect, exhortation to cause. As a matter of fact, this hortatory pattern is more of a chain-like sort of thing, so that quite often what you have when you have it in James, you'll have an indicative, this is the form or the mode of a declarative statement, what is indicative, that would be the theological cause, which then leads by way of causation, therefore, to the imperative command. So, this would be what one might say lifestyle demand, and that imperative is itself not only the effect of the preceding indicative but is substantiated by the following indicative, again, theological cause, which then causes the next imperative, lifestyle demand, and on and on you go so that the same indicative is both substantiates the preceding imperative and is a cause for the succeeding imperative.

Now, this is important to observe because it really has to do with the, well, for one thing, the relationship between thinking or orientation, theological conviction, and life, expression, and translation into life; it really has to do, though, with the structure of the Christian life. And so, as I say, this kind of thing can be very significant in terms of getting at the message and even the theology and the notion of the Christian life that we have in the book. Again, I would raise questions, definitive, rational, and implicational questions with regard to this structural feature, and again, I won't take our video time to read through all of those specific questions.

Then, beyond that, we have, I think, a recurring contrast between proper Christian behavior, which James refers to, I think, essentially, as friendship with God, a phrase that you find twice in this book. You find it. First of all, in 2:23, Abraham believed God, quoting from Genesis 15, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. And then, James goes ahead and comments, and he was called a friend of God.

And then, again, in chapter 4, verse 4, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. So, that Christian, proper Christian behavior is really oriented towards the ultimate reality in the epistle of James, and that is God, friendship with God, whereas improper behavior, putting my Christian quotation marks there, but improper behavior, he describes in terms of friendship with the world. Now, this contrast is, of course, found throughout and repeatedly, both in the exhortations and in the theological arguments.

It transcends the distinction between indicative and imperative, and you can see here just how dominant it is within the epistle. Now, it's often been pointed out, and of course, it's quite obvious, that James has a lot in common with the wisdom

tradition of the Old Testament and the Intertestamental period, and this was one of the characteristics of wisdom instruction in the Old Testament and in Judaism, the notion basically of the two ways. And so, the idea is that behavior and thinking are not piecemeal, that there are basically two ways, and you're either walking in one path, one way, or you're walking in the other way, and each of them involves a complex of thinking and behavior so that the ways are contrasted with each other.

Then beyond that, and that's, as I say, what you have, what you seem to have here in James, that's what we're picking up on here, and again, we raise questions. I want you to have access to them, but again, I will not take the time to read through them all. Now, it's possible that we have a climax here in James, and the way I see it, it may involve a comparison.

It has to do really with the very last statement in the book in 5:19 through 20. My brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. So, in 1-2 through 5:18, we have James' exhortations aimed to direct his readers in the path of truth and away from error.

And by the way, it's quite manifestly the case that when he talks about truth and error, he's not talking about, certainly not talking exclusively about theological truth and theological error, but more holistically. That is to say, truth has to do both with thinking and with behavior that springs from thinking, right thinking, and error has to do with wrong thinking and behavior that springs from wrong thinking. So, this business of truth and error is not simply cognitive or intellectual; it is holistic.

But James' exhortations aim to direct his readers in the path of truth and away from error, leading to this climactic statement in 5:19 through 20, which involves concluding counsel for readers, the readers to continue the same pastoral work, to do the same kinds of things in an ongoing fashion that James is attempting to do in this epistle itself. That's where you get the comparison. Continue the same pastoral work of direction and reclamation as James has pursued within the book itself, and for the readers to avail themselves of this ministry on the part of others in the church insofar as they require it.

The same practice of pastoral caregiving and instruction in the book is to be carried on by others in the real world of the reader according to 5:19 through 20. Well again, everything that we observe and survey is tentative. It doesn't mean that at the end of the day this would prove to be right, but really the thing that's essential in survey is that the observations you make are plausible.

It may turn out on the basis of later stages of study, including interpretation, that some of the observations that you made in book survey you think were not correct

and need to be changed. There's no problem with that. The process, as I mentioned earlier, is self-correcting, but you have to start somewhere, and survey is an orientation of the book.

You make the best sense out of these things as you can, knowing that you have plenty of opportunity to correct any sorts of misobservations as you move along. And again, we have questions there which I'll bring up, and you can pause and look at them and pore over them if you want to, but I won't take time to read them now. So that's essentially my understanding of the survey of the book in the large.

Key versus strategic areas that represent major structural relationships. 1:1, of course, would represent preparation realization. 1:5 through 8, 1:12 through 18, and 1:22 through 25, it seems to me, represent particularization with instrumentation.

Here, of course, you pick up on this business of wisdom in 1:5 through 8 and the word in 1:22 through 25, but also this whole business of trial and temptation in 1:12 through 18, which in a major way are developed in the rest of the book. This also represents the recurrence of causation and substantiation, which is a hortatory pattern that we just described, and the recurrence of contrast between the two ways that are, of course, represented in these verses as well. 2:14 through 26, this is the discussion of the role of faith here.

Faith and works represents the recurrence of causation and substantiation and the recurrence of contrast, and then 5:19 through 20, arguably, as I mentioned, is climaxed with comparison, and that passage then would be a key passage on the basis of that structure. Then in terms of data bearing on higher critical questions, the writer identifies himself at least as James in terms of his status or function. He describes himself as a servant of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We don't assume anything here, so we note that he may have been a Jew. We have repeated references to the law and repeated references to Old Testament characters. Now, it's quite clear that a Gentile writer could make use of the Hebrew scriptures, and I'll draw a constant allusion to it, but the fact that this happens, that the writer makes these kinds of references in these ways, and this frequency might suggest a Jewish writer.

There are, of course, also repeated references to wisdom, which again might be suggestive of a Jewish writer. The recipients are described in terms of location in the dispersion, but we really don't know quite what that means and whether he's using dispersion in a literal, geographical way or in a theological way. You see, when you're identifying higher critical data at the point of book survey, you don't have any choice but to make certain interpretive moves that you're not really prepared to make at this stage.

That's why I say that everything that we identify, including higher critical data in the book and what that data may point to in terms of these background issues, is tentative. But anyway, he may be talking about their physical location when he says in the dispersion here in 1:1. It may have been Jews. Of course, there's a reference to the twelve tribes of the dispersion in 1:1, although that could be understood metaphorically as well and not necessarily ethnically or racially.

Abraham is called our father in 2.21. Now again, usually, of course, there's quite a bit of distinction made between Paul and James, especially in chapter 2. We're going to talk about that. But it's quite clear that at least Paul considers Abraham the father of all who have faith, not just of Jews. So, this would not necessarily mean that these were Jewish readers or Jewish Christian readers, but it may point toward that.

They may have been enduring trials and persecutions, especially at the hands of the wealthy, and may have been experiencing serious factiousness in the church. Let me just mention that there is a deep-seated practice in especially New Testament scholarship, that operates on the basis that if a writer, particularly an epistolary writer, makes a great deal of something, makes a point of something, that indicates that this was either a problem or a potential problem among the readership. This is called mirror reading.

That whole practice has come under a good bit of criticism of late. And so, it's important to realize that in principle, of course, it's certainly true that simply because a writer makes an issue of something doesn't necessarily mean that it was a problem in the church. It may have been simply something that he considers important for all Christians, no matter what their situation, to hear about and to know about.

But it may point toward a problem among the recipients. And so, that's why we mention this and talk about it using very tentative language. They may have been enduring trials and persecutions, especially at the hands of the wealthy.

And incidentally, there are certain statements that he makes that actually suggest that that may be the case. For example, 2.6, is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the honorable name which was invoked over you? And the like, which does sound, on the surface at least, situational and may have been experiencing serious factiousness in the church. Again, he talks about that and emphasizes it in 3.1 through 4.12. In terms of occasion for writing and what might have prompted the writing of this book, one thing possibly was trials and persecutions at the hand of the wealthy may have tempted the readers to discouragement and impatience.

Again, you can see the mirror reading here, which we have to be careful of. And by the way, especially careful of this mirror reading, I might say, when we're talking about general epistles over against those which involve most of the epistles of Paul

at least, which were directed explicitly to specific congregations and the like. In these general epistles, you do not have the kind of specificity, at least not explicitly, in terms of particular churches that may have been addressed here.

And so, you have to leave room for the possibility that James, for example, is a true general epistle, that it is sent out to various churches, and that what he's talking about he considers to be maybe potential problems or things that he thinks are important for all Christians to hear and know about, but not particularly prompted by specific problems in the situation of the churches. On the other hand, it might have been prompted by what he at least believed to be a certain specific problem in some of these places where he knew this epistle would be, where he knew it would be received. Several serious problems read the effect of Christian living on these readers, at least actually or potentially, including temptation to ascribe problems to God while ignoring God's good gifts, the tendency to separate faith from action, partiality shown to the wealthy who attend Christian assemblies, and angry and evil slanderous speech with threat to destroy Christian fellowship, and other major impressions relating to the book as a whole, just a couple of things here.

A toner atmosphere is often quite helpful. We're going to talk later on when we look at the process of interpretation about the role of toner atmosphere, the feel of books or the feel of passages, and how that may in fact inform their interpretation. This book is characterized by ambivalence, I think, between anger and gentleness.

The reader senses a white heat of righteous indignation on the part of the writer. Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, he says in 220, but also feels the warm gentleness of the pastoral shepherd. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

We note, too, that there are several references to nature, and James's illustrations, in general, are quite vivid. So quite clearly, James sees a connection between God's actions, God's revelation in nature, and what we might call special revelation, the revelation of God in his word and through the gospel. So that would be really the survey of James.

This might actually be a good point just to pause for a break.

This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 9, Book Survey, James.