

The Relecture of James from the Stream of Jewish Wisdom

K.K. Yeo

I. Jewish that Other than OT

Biblio: Johnson, 29-48, Clifford 9-13, Robert F. Chaffin, "The Theme of Wisdom In the Epistle of James," *Ashland Theo Journal* 29 (1997): 23-49.

- A. Other Than OT, see Johnson, 34-46, also Bauckham, 74ff.
- a. The Pirke Aboth (Sayings of the Fathers)
 - b. Qumran: IQS (Manual of Discipline), CD (Damascus Document)
 - c. The Sentences of the Syriac Menander
 - d. The Letter of Aristeas
 - e. 4 Maccabees
 - f. The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides
 - g. Philo
 - h. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs
 - i. Jesu Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus)

B. Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, see Johnson, *Brother of Jesus*, 51-52:

Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the use of Greek topoi, combination of sapiential and apocalyptic material, similar to James. Both James and the Testaments not using allegorical readings of the Alexanderian compositions, but specifically Palestinian modes of halachic midrash, e.g., Lev 19 in James, thus similar to Paul's techniques.

James' saying about mercy and mercilessness in 2:13, is found in TZeb 8.3 and TGad 5.2.

Then the overarching symbolism of T12P and James:

Cosmic options are spelled out in terms ethical behavior.

Despite these points of contact, there are good reason for doubting the dependence of T12P on James. See Johnson, *Brother of Jesus*, 52.

C. Jesu Ben Sira

Ecclesiasticus

James

<1:23> A patient man will endure until the right moment,
and then joy will burst forth for him.

<2:1> My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord,
prepare yourself for temptation.

<2:2> Set your heart right and be steadfast,
and do not be hasty in time of calamity.

<2:3> Cleave to him and do not depart,
that you may be honored at the end of your life.

<2:4> Accept whatever is brought upon you,
and in changes that humble you be patient.

<2:5> For gold is tested in the fire,
and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation.

<1:26> If you desire wisdom, keep the commandments,
and the Lord will supply it for you.

See Bauckham, 83ff!

II. From OT:

A. "James can be regarded as a reinterpretation of the symbolic world of Torah in the light of the confession of Jesus as Messiah and Lord (1:1, 2:1)." (Johnson, 29) "Torah is not only law to be observed but also wisdom for instruction" (Johnson, 29), Deut 4:6: "This is your wisdom and understanding before all the nations." "The prophets call the apostate people back to the covenant and use wisdom motifs (see Isa 11:2; 29:14; Amos 5:13). Specifically,

'wisdom' literature not only reinforces covenantal nomism (LXX Pss 1:2; 118:1, 18; Sir 24:23, 2:12-16; Wis 18:9) but often does so with prophetic cadence and urgency (Prov 8:1-36; sir 5:1-8)." (Johnson, 29)

James and wisdom themes of OT:

- the danger of an unbridled tongue (James 3; Prov 10:18-21),
- danger of presumptuous planning (Jas 4:13-17; Prov 16:1),
- danger of ill-gotten wealth (Jas 5:1-6; Prov 10:2-3).
- James exalts "wisdom from above" (Jas 3:13-18 see Job 28; Prov 8; Sirach 24).
- In Jas 3:17, wisdom from above is designated by seven qualities, recalling the famous 21 qualities of wisdom in Wis 7:22-23.

a. James and the Jewish Law

The law is thematic in James.

b. Prophecy: James draws on prophetic and wisdom traditions of Jewish faith.

c. Wisdom: Wisdom is made thematic in 1:5 and 3:13-18.

d. Cosmogonies

Divine purpose in creation, including determined time (sacred time), temple, king, and other institutions (see Gen 1-11, Psalms 33; 77; 89; 93; 96-98; 104; Isa 40-66; etc.)

e. James and Job on suffering

James and suffering (different from James and social injustice): the belief of God is one (James 2:19), and the call to accountability and purpose.

f. James and form and beauty:

Rules and laws structured into the world at creation can be discovered and reexpressed through wisdom in the forms of artful words and pictures and music. See Genre lecture

g. Wisdom and eschatology:

Human wisdom has limits.

h. Wisdom and Human Choices ("retribution"—deed and its effect, not punishment of external force)

i. James and "good and perfect gift" and gazing into the law of freedom"

Courting Wisdom, constant reflection.

III. Conclusion: James's Wisdom

Wisdom *from God* (James 1:17; 3:15, 17)—monotheistic, and neither mere general revelation nor order beyond divine will (i.e., without divine purpose or planning). According to Jewish wisdom, there is no wisdom outside God's will. Divine planning, thus meaning despite chaos, and believing there is an order/design that will work, despite disruption.

The single human response that brings wisdom within the reach of attainment is obedience. It is those who hearken to Yahweh's law and seek to apply it to the multifarious ways of life who will gain wisdom and know how to walk before Yahweh with humility and devotion, especially in time of testing.

Faith is seen in social relationship for those who believe in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ (2:1). Faith is the solidarity with the oppressed and poor. In 2:14-26 thirteen verses, πίστις occurs eleven times.