



McKnight, Scot.

The Letter of James

New International Commentary on the New Testament

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

I've often quipped that the letter of James is the most practical Christian living book ever written. It's a text I return to time after time to draw from its practical wisdom; a text that I can learn from and apply without much instruction from anyone other than James himself. So this is actually the first commentary on James that I've ever looked at. Scot McKnight assures us that this is not a "commentary on commentaries or the ins and outs of scholarly suggestions on every point that can be raised about this most vexing of early Christian letters," but rather it is "an *ecclesial* commentary that attempts to expound the meaning of the text" (xi). Sounds good to me!

McKnight reads James as a letter focused on ethics ("doing good, speaking the right way, and expressing the gospel in the socioeconomic ways of compassion and mercy" [7]), but an ethic understood in light of Jesus' role (as fulfiller, not replacer of Torah) in Israel's unfolding story. "James reads and interprets and applies the Torah through the lens of the *Shema* (Deut 6:4-9) and the command to love our neighbor as ourselves (Lev 19:18)" (5). This gets to the heart of why I personally find James so practical; it's guided by the "great commandments," more obviously (to me at least) than other books in the NT that have different emphases.

The commentary itself, so far as I have read, is full of exegetical insight informed by socio-historical considerations. McKnight uses the NRSV as his base text with constant comparison to the TNIV. Bibliographies and footnotes abound, as is common in the NICNT series, but

McKnight is forthright in the fact that he's not looking to reinvent the wheel. His goal is modest: he wants to help students understand James for James. There's no overriding concern to read James in light of Paul and the debate about faith and works although he does touch on these things. McKnight sees the influence of wisdom traditions but he doesn't find them around every corner. He's skeptical (and rightly so) that James ever employs Greco-Roman rhetoric. Throughout (so far as I've read) McKnight makes sober judgment after sober judgment.

I'd be remiss not to mention McKnight's view on the Christology of James. While not quite as developed as Paul, John, or the author of Hebrews, James shows us a "glimpse into the emerging high christology of the earliest messianic, Land-of-Israel, community" (201). The dual identification of both the Father (1:17; 3:9; 4:10, 15; 5:4) and Jesus (2:1) as Lord alongside ambiguous passages (5:7-8, 10-11,14, 15) points toward the deity of Christ. Add to this the references to "the name" (2:7; possibly 5:10) of Jesus and the case is even tighter.

This will undoubtedly be my "go to" commentary on James for years to come.