The Wisdom of James the Just

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Introduction

It has long been recognized that James has, among the New Testament books, a special relationship to Jewish wisdom literature. A quick glance at the margins of a Nestle-Aland text turns up more than thirty cross-references to Jewish wisdom literature of the Old Testament or intertestamental period, versus ten to the Pentateuch, eighteen to Prophets, and seventeen to Psalms (some of which are "wisdom" psalms). While Jewish wisdom literature clearly influenced James, scholars still debate the nature and extent of that influence. Almost all scholars who have studied James agree that there is some kind of relevant background in Jewish wisdom literature. However, while some would go so far as to call James the "wisdom" book of the NT,[1] and a few even suggest that it was originally a strictly Jewish wisdom text that was only later Christianized,[2] others such as Ropes and Dibelius argue that, though James seems to be influenced in some way by Jewish wisdom materials, the essential nature of the book is hellenistic.[3] Most interpreters in the last few decades have landed somewhere in between, recognizing the influences of both Greek rhetorical devices and language, and Jewish material content and forms. Further, the Jewish influence is not restricted to wisdom. The margins of Nestle-Aland[27] also reveal that of the eight actual *quotations* in James, only two are wisdom texts, most citations being from the Pentateuch. Moreover, the fierce invective of 5:1-6 certainly sounds more like Israel's prophets than her sages.

The object of this study is two-fold: first, to identify more precisely the relation of James to the *genres* of Jewish wisdom literature, and second, to describe the character of James's particular "wisdom" content. That is to say, we will ask, first, "Can James be called 'wisdom literature' in any sense," and, second, "What is the nature of the wisdom that James urges believers to ask for?"

James and Jewish Wisdom Literature

Before we can address the first question, we must ask, "what is Jewish wisdom literature?" This is not easy to answer, since those books that are generally identified as wisdom are so diverse, both in form and in content. Though scholars give various answers to this question, some general distinguishing marks are frequently mentioned.

First, we agree with Crenshaw that the term "wisdom" can apply either to certain *generic forms* that appear in the wisdom literature (e.g., series of aphorisms, instruction books, nature lists, extended dialogic poetry, self-addressed reflection) or to the *themes* that wisdom tends to address in various forms (e.g., the meaning of life, the problem of suffering, mastery of one's environment, grappling with finitude, and the quest for truth that is assumed to be concealed within the created order).[4] Wisdom literature can be identified by form or by content.

Second, wisdom is a practical matter. It is not a quest for knowledge for its own sake, but knowledge of how to live. Wisdom "is the reasoned search for specific

ways to assure well-being and the implementation of those discoveries in daily existence."[5] It also appeals to the human desire to have some measure of control over what happens to us. Wisdom's admonitions are expressed not in terms of *duty* but of *advantage*.[6]

Furthermore, wisdom is, at least in its earlier forms, something hidden. Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth, Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon are all *searching* books, which try to ascertain the truth of the matter. Wisdom is typically linked to creational rather than covenantal theology because wisdom is looking for the inherent order in the world, which enables humans to control their world. But Jewish wisdom books, coming from a cultural environment that depends on God, must struggle with the tension between the self-reliance implicit in such a search and dependence on God's mercy and disposition, which certainly cannot be controlled by human effort.[7]

Does James fit this pattern? First of all, we must note that there is no question that there are several points of similarity. E. Baasland[8] has noted at least eight "wisdom" elements in James:

(1) James knows and uses Proverbs. James 4:6 cites Proverbs 3:34, and James 5:20 at least directly alludes to Proverbs 10:12. To this we might add the echo of Proverbs 27:1 ("do not boast about tomorrow") in James 4:13-16, and many other parallels, though these do not necessarily evince direct dependence.
(2) James explicitly refers to wisdom in 1:5 and 3:13-18.
(3) According to Baasland, at least 40 of the 108 verses of James have literary parallels in wisdom literature.
(4) The language and style of James reflect wisdom origins. Baasland refers to the work of Halson,[9] who notes that of James's 67 NT hapaxes, 34 are found in the wisdom literature of the LXX. And of the 21 words that James shares with only one other NT author, 19 occur commonly in the wisdom books.
(5) James is fond of using highly pictorial language, in ways similar to Sirach and other wisdom writers. Some of this is directly paralleled in Sirach. Compare Sirach's "double-heart" (Sir 1:28) and testing by fire (Sir 2:5) with James's double-minded doubter (1:8) and the fire of the tongue (3:6). But it is the sheer quantity of these vibrant illustrations that marks James as clearly standing in this tradition. The stream of illustrative examples on the tongue in James 3:3-12 is breath-taking: bits in horses' mouths, great ships and little rudders, sparks and forest fires, the taming of animals, fresh and salt water springs, and fruit trees, all in just ten verses. The reader also encounters dead bodies (2:26), waves and wind (1:6), misty vapors (4:14), mirrors (1:23), fading flowers (1:10), and patient farmers (5:7-8).[10]
(6) James, alone among NT writers, specifically names Job as a pattern to be emulated.[11]
(7) Verses that are transitional from one general subject to another are typically drawn from wisdom tradition (Jas 1:4-8, 27, 4:6, 5:19).
(8) Most important are particular themes of James that, while sporadically found elsewhere in the Bible, are *central* in wisdom. For example, James highlights the themes of concern for widows and orphans,[12] respect of persons, use and misuse of the tongue, and caution regarding future planning.

To this list many other points of contact could be noted. Especially noteworthy is the relationship of James to Sirach. Nestle-Aland[27] notes no fewer than 11 allusions to Sirach in James, compared with 6 allusions and 2 citations from Proverbs. Moreover, there are some very obvious shared themes: the dangers of the tongue (Sir 19:6-12, 20:5-8, 18-20, 22:27, 28:13-26, 35:7-9), the notion that wisdom is a gift from God (Sir 1:1-10), the dangers

of pride (10:7-18), and the warning against blaming God for sin (Sir 15:11-20).

In addition to these parallels between James and second temple Jewish wisdom, there are similarities in their way of thinking:

> (1) A person's life is lived *either* in good connections or in *bad*. An ethical dualism predominates in both James and in Jewish wisdom. Note in particular the contrast between sin giving birth to death, and God giving birth to "us" (1:15, 18), the father of lights vs. the shifting shadow (1:17), the perfect (*teleion*) work of patience (1:4) vs. the maturation (*apotelestheisa*) of sin (1:15), and the single-minded (*haplōs*) giving of God (1:5) vs. the double mindedness (*dipsychos*) of a human being (1:8).
> (2) As in Jewish wisdom literature generally, there is a fairly strong thematic concern in James that deeds have consequences. (Baasland refers to this as Tat-Folge Denken).[13]

Not only the themes, but also the generic forms of wisdom literature are evident in James. Davids notes that James exhibits an "apparently disjointed and proverbial nature of style."[14] Many of the sayings in James, even though they have contextual linkages within the Epistle, could easily stand alone. This aphoristic style is one of the most notable features shared by James and Proverbs. Halson counts 23 short, isolated aphorisms. But also like Proverbs, James has a few somewhat longer discourses, of which Halson identifies seven or eight (2:1-9, 2:14-26, 3:13-17, 4:1-6, 4:13-16, 5:1-6 and possibly 5:16b-18).[15] Compare the "my son" discourses in Proverbs 1-7, and the virtuous wife discourse in Proverbs 31:10-31.

Several recent studies highlight similarities between James and specific instances of Jewish wisdom literature. For example, in 1993 D. E. Gowan showed the similarity of the presuppositions of James 1:2-5 with those of 4 Maccabees.[16] And just recently D. Verseput noticed the structural similarities with one of the wisdom texts found at Qumran (4Q185).[17]

But as Verseput also warns, "the pervasiveness of wisdom elements throughout all the literature of the Second Temple period suggests that the Epistle of James cannot be accurately grouped among the wisdom documents by merely pointing out sapiential motifs or by imprudently associating its structure with wisdom instruction."[18] And James certainly has some characteristics that do not fit the wisdom pattern.

First, at the very least it must be said that James is incomprehensible apart from certain Christian presuppositions. U. Luck points to such things as God the father giving birth to us by the word of truth (1:17-18), the implanted word (1:21), the reference to the audience as "beloved brethren" (1:19, 2:5, cf. 2:1, 14), the importance of and nature of true faith (2:14-26), and the "elders of the church" (5:14) as all stemming from the unique social environment of early Christianity.[19] These things have no parallel in wisdom literature.[20]

Second, James does not seem so much concerned with the intellectual search for wisdom as with moral action befitting true wisdom.[21] While James is not unique among his Jewish contemporaries in thinking of wisdom as a moral matter, when speaking of wisdom itself (3:13-18), he appears to be setting a true, active, socially conscientious wisdom over against a false kind of wisdom that boasts and abandons social obligations in favor of private, intellectualized concerns.[22] This contrast of true and false wisdom is at best rare in wisdom literature (though it does have an interesting counterpart in

the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians.

Third, James does not fit into the literary categories of wisdom literature. Crenshaw lists eight such categories: proverb, riddle, allegory, hymn, dialogue, autobiographical narrative, noun lists, and didactic narrative.[23] Of these only the proverb and the dialogue have a generic counterpart in some of James's aphorisms and the literarily constructed interlocution of James 2:18. But whereas these genres are indigenous and constitutive in wisdom literature, they are only useful tools in James, and his main arguments can be sustained without them. Most of James, as already noted, is imperatival in tone,[24] even to the point of upbraiding the hearers and calling down woes, more like OT prophets than sages.

But the most significant difference is that James appears to be deeply conscious of *real* existential problems, not just generalized truths. The exhortations to "stop fighting" (ch. 4) and to anoint and pray for the sick (ch. 5) have no counterpart in wisdom literature. And the diatribe against favoritism in chapter 2 bears the vivid marks of real occurrences. Though the situations may be common enough that James can address them in a circular letter, they are specific enough to characterize James not as a book of wisdom *per se*, but as a work that uses the wisdom tradition and forms familiar to his audience. Nor can we place James firmly in the camp of Hellenistic diatribes or paraeneses.[25] If nothing else, the passion of James 4:1-6, 5:1-6, 2:4, and 2:14-17 ought to clue us in to the fact that the author of James is neither a remote sage in his school nor a hellenistic preacher uttering generalities. He is a pastor concerned for his people.

Nevertheless, James does recognize that his audience values wisdom, and offers a picture of what true, godly wisdom looks like. An examination of his letter reveals at least five characteristics: (1) True wisdom is a divine gift (and therefore related to faith); (2) true wisdom is primarily ethical rather than intellectual; (3) wisdom is eschatologically motivated; (4) wisdom is spiritual in nature; and (5) true wisdom is the wisdom of Jesus. The first three of these have points of similarity with some (though by no means all) other Jewish wisdom; the last two are uniquely James.

Wisdom Is a Divine Gift

James actually mentions wisdom twice in his epistle (1:5 and 3:13-18). In both places the concern is not for wisdom generally but on true wisdom, which is of divine origin. "If anyone lacks wisdom let him ask from the God who gives to all unstintingly." The notion that wisdom is obtained by asking God for it is rooted in the prayer of Solomon (1 Kings 3) and the relationship between wisdom being a gift and, therefore, the need to ask for it is developed in Wisdom of Solomon 8:17-9:18.[26]

The longer discussion of wisdom occurs in 3:13-18. P. Hartin regards this as the "very heart and centre of the body of the epistle."[27] Whether that is the case or not, certainly James shares the opinion of other Jewish wisdom that wisdom is a divine gift.

In addition, because true wisdom comes "from above" it is, therefore, singularly inappropriate to boast about it (3:14), for to do so gives the lie to one's claim to be speaking the truth.[28] True wisdom is therefore humble.[29]

But James goes further, because wisdom in James is closely related to *faith*.

Baasland, who is willing to call James a Christian wisdom book, nevertheless recognizes a clear distinction from common Jewish wisdom. James's exhortation to wisdom is on the basis of faith (and according to Baasland, baptism); it is not a "clan" wisdom or simply the "Torah" wisdom found elsewhere, but an eschatological, Christian wisdom. Notice the relationship of true and false wisdom in 3:15-17 to true and false faith in 2:14ff. Compare for example 3:13 and 2:18:

> 2:18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.
> 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good behavior his works [done] in the meekness of wisdom.

Just as true faith produces good works, so does true wisdom.

In 5:7-11, James contrasts the farmer's wisdom, patiently waiting for God, with indifference to the poor. This seems an odd juxtaposition, but this seemingly odd contrast shows the connection with faith. Faith also waits in trust, but if it is indifferent to the poor it is no true faith.

Finally, James says that faith without works is vain, empty (*argē*). Vanity is of course a wisdom concern: Ecclesiastes particularly dwells on the emptiness and vanity of life in this world. James seems to pick up on this, so that even a life of faith is vain, empty, and meaningless, if it is a "faith" that does not act in accordance with its precepts. True wisdom is true faith.

Wisdom Is Ethical Rather than Intellectual

The "first of all" attribute of wisdom in 3:17 is that it is pure (*hagnē*). For James wisdom is essentially an ethical quality.[30] Knowledge, "savvy," cleverness, and wit may all be considered forms of wisdom, but these can be used for impure purposes. They may easily become both the grounds and means of boasting. But ethical purity, if it boasts, ceases to be purity, and hence a wisdom that is contentious or boastful ceases to be wisdom.[31] Because of this basic quality of purity, true wisdom produces its other ethical fruit: peacemaking, gentleness, etc.

As already noted, just as faith is associated with ethical behavior, so is wisdom. Wisdom exhibits good behavior and meekness (3:13) and runs contrary to bitter envy, ambition, boasting and lying (3:14). At no point in James is wisdom simply a matter of the knowing of facts (theoretical knowledge) or even of know-how (practical knowledge).

In particular, the wisdom of James focuses on two ethical issues: speech ethics and humility. The speech ethics of James is the subject of a special study by William Baker, who gives ample evidence for James's roots in the speech ethics of the ancient Near East, particularly as found in Jewish wisdom.[32] But the ethics of *humility* is certainly a dominant theme in Jewish wisdom as well, and many, if not all, the economic and social ethical matters in James essentially stem from concern for humility. The description of wisdom in 3:13-18 is largely a description of humility: it lacks bitter envy, ambition, and boasting, and is instead peacable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy. And consider the ills that James rails against throughout the book: boasting (1:9), blaming God for sin (1:13-14; cf. Sir 15:11-20), favoritism (2:1-7; cf. Prov 14:21), friendship with the world (4:1-10, including a

quotation of Prov 3:34 [LXX] and the exhortation to "humble yourselves" in v. 10), judging brethren (4:11-12; cf. Wis 1:11), and merchant planning without recognizing God (4:13-17; cf. Prov 27:1). Pride lies at the root of them all. Even the evils of the tongue may be classified here, since the section in chapter 3 begins with the warning that not many should be teachers. Apparently, the desire to be called "rabbi" survived in the church, even though Jesus had discouraged it (Matt 23:7-8).

Of course, the ethical character of wisdom is not unknown in Jewish wisdom. As noted below, later Judaism recognized all or almost all the books of the OT as the word of God, and the ethical demands of Torah stood as the supreme standard of life, so an increasingly revelational notion of wisdom permeated later Judaism. And indeed much of the later Jewish wisdom literature identifies Wisdom with God's law.[33] The identification of wisdom with Torah may have its roots even in the earliest levels. In Proverbs 9:10 the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and "the fear of the Lord" in Psalms 19:9 appears in synonymous parallelism with the law, the decrees, the precepts, the commandment, and the ordinances of the Lord.[34]

Since the Torah is the ultimate source of wisdom, it is a freedom-giving Torah (2:12), but James takes an additional step and refers to the word of God as *implanted* (1:21). Here is another way in which James's uniquely Christian application of wisdom finds expression. For the wise, freedom-giving Law of God to be effective, especially the royal law of love (2:8),[35] it must be implanted (1:21).[36] Once implanted it must be received humbly.[37] Sustaining the agricultural metaphor, the humble response to God's planting of ethical wisdom eventuates in the production of good fruits (3:17). The following verse encapsulates this in what sounds like a wisdom saying, "fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who do peace."[38]

Since wisdom is primarily a moral or ethical entity in James rather than intellectual or cognitive, the prayer mandate of 1:5 comes into clearer focus. The *lack* of wisdom that one should pray to have remedied is not an intelligence gap, but a moral gap. The one who prays should ask for *moral* fortitude in order to face suffering and temptation, and thereby become "perfect."

Wisdom Is Eschatologically Motivated

Though the eschatological dimension of James, particularly in his exhortations to patience, is clear enough, the recent work of Todd Penner has brought new focus to this dimension of James's thought. Penner shows that the eschatological dimension more thoroughly penetrates the whole of the epistle than had previously been observed.[39]

Such an eschatological focus is not typical of wisdom literature. Ancient Near Eastern wisdom generally takes its cue from *creation* and focuses on God's work and truth in the created order. Eschatology receives its impetus from redemption, stemming from a distrust of this world and a longing for the future overthrow of the present order. In wisdom, the idea is to avoid the natural retributions and seek the natural rewards of this present age; eschatology recognizes that this world is not fair, and seeks reward and punishment in the future.

However, two forces were at work to merge these notions. First, wisdom became frustrated by the problems of

unjust suffering. Just as Jewish prophets struggled with the cognitive dissonance generated by a belief in Israel's election in the face of Israel's poor political situation, so Jewish wisdom struggled with the cognitive dissonance of a world where traditional wisdom did not always work. Hence intertestamental Jewish wisdom was drawn increasingly towards the redemptive-eschatological framework of the prophets.

Second, the nature of the wisdom concept changed. As awareness grew of a *revealed* wisdom from God (as opposed to what humans are able to figure out for themselves), wisdom became more associated with participation in God's wisdom, not just in creation, but in redemption and law.[40] The seeds of this change are already there in such passages as Isaiah 33:6, where wisdom and understanding are *eschatological* blessings, and Isaiah 11:2, where the spirit of wisdom is a messianic endowment. Already in Daniel, wisdom and eschatology were being fused (Daniel was a sage, but his wisdom was supernatural), and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs has many instances of both traditional wisdom and eschatological expectation. Eschatology and wisdom also come together in Wisdom of Solomon and 4 Maccabees.

James stands in this stream. As Bauckham says, "an eschatological orientation is not therefore anomalous; it is to be expected in wisdom paraenesis from the first century C.E."[41] However, while the later wisdom books have an interest in God's judgment and refer to eschatology as a way of resolving certain wisdom questions, the sayings and admonitions of James, like those of Jesus, have an eschatological dimension not found in classical Jewish wisdom material.[42] This is no doubt because James recognizes the fact that the eschatological expectations are already being fulfilled. Although the parousia is still to come (5:7), James knows that the messiah has already come (2:1). Hence the divine gift of wisdom is now freely available to all who ask in faith (1:5-6). Above all, the readers are the "firstfruits of his creation" (1:18) who were given birth by the word of truth. The eschatological harvest has already begun.

Wisdom Is Spiritual

Remarkably, James never refers to the Holy Spirit in his letter.[43] J. A. Kirk[44] is probably right in arguing that wisdom is effectively functioning in James as the Holy Spirit does in other NT writings. Kirk observed the following:

> (1) First, wisdom in James, like the Holy Spirit in the Gospels, is a good gift that is requested of the Father. James 1:5 speaks of asking God for the gift of wisdom, which 1:17 goes on to speak of as every good gift, which comes down from above, from a heavenly Father (Father of lights).[45] This is very much like Matthew 7:7, which speaks of asking the heavenly Father for good gifts, and its parallel in Luke 11:11-13, which identifies the good gift requested and given as the Holy Spirit.
> (2) James 3:9 also refers to God's fatherhood as the reason for his giving of wisdom. Here the wisdom from above provides the ability to control and direct the tongue.
> (3) There are some striking parallels between the fruit of wisdom in James 3:17 and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-6:8. (Note again that wisdom in James is not primarily intellectual but moral.)
> (4) Several references to wisdom elsewhere in the NT also refer to the Spirit. Ephesians 1:17 is the most obvious, where the author prays "that the Father may give you the Spirit of wisdom." The Spirit of wisdom is of course the Spirit given to

Messiah in Isaiah 11:2. Likewise where Colossians 1:28 relates the Spirit to maturity and trials, James 1:4-5 connects maturity and trials with wisdom. In contrast to the Holy Spirit and true wisdom is false wisdom and the spirit of the world in 1 Corinthians 2:12.[46] First Corinthians 12:8 identifies the Spirit as the source of the utterance of wisdom. Finally Acts 6:3, picking up again on the messianic promise of Isaiah 11, refers to those qualified to be deacons as those "filled with the Spirit and wisdom."

Kirk found the roots of this wisdom-Spirit identification in the Old Testament and Jewish wisdom literature. Throughout the OT, wisdom and the presence of God's spirit are closely linked (Gen 41:38-39, Exod 31:3-4 [cf. Exod 28:3], Deut 34:9, Isa 11:2). The activity of the creator Spirit of Genesis 1:1-2 resembles the activity of wisdom in Proverbs 8. Likewise Sirach 24:3-5 portrays wisdom in terms of the Spirit of Genesis. In Genesis Rabbah 85, Solomon's wisdom is identified as the product of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And Haggai 2:5 suggests an identification of the pillar of cloud and fire as "my Spirit," i.e., the Spirit of God (echoed in Wis 10:17). Broadly speaking, the functions of the Spirit of God in the OT frequently become in the intertestamental period the functions of wisdom (cf. *1 Enoch* 5:6-9 with Isa 11:2ff).

Hence Peter Davids suggests, "if some works have a wisdom christology, James has a wisdom pneumatology, for wisdom in James functions as the Spirit does in Paul."[47] This may be somewhat overstated, but James conceives of wisdom not as an abstract intellectual ability or cleverness at manipulating life, but as God's eschatological gift to the believer (the one who asks in faith) that empowers him or her to live rightly and to endure persecution and trials. James's wisdom is no "earthy" wisdom: it comes down from above (3:15).

Wisdom Is the Teaching of Jesus

The correspondences of James with the teaching of Jesus are numerous. Mussner[48] documents twenty-seven instances where James's teaching reflects that of Jesus. Of these, eleven are identified as "Q" material, six as uniquely Lukan, seven as uniquely Matthean, and two as Markan (though in one case the Markan material is also found in Matthew and in the other in all three Synoptic Gospels). Hence the correspondence with Matthew is very high, with twenty-one of the twenty-seven references being found in Matthew. Fourteen of these are found in the Sermon on the Mount.

Some of these correspondences may be found elsewhere in Jewish literature. For example, the notion that the one who keeps the whole law but stumbles in one matter has become guilty of all (James 2:10), occurs in both Jesus' teaching (Matt 5:19) and in Jewish teaching (*m. 'Abot* 2:1, *Sifre Deut* 96:3.2),[49] though James and Jesus seem to have strengthened this notion somewhat. Likewise the warning against slander or grumbling (Jas 4:11, 5:9; Matt 7:1-5) resembles Wisdom 1:11.

Jesus and James reflect Jewish wisdom in the form as well as the content of their teaching. R. Bauckham,[50] referring to the work of David Aune in classifying the aphorisms of Jesus,[51] notes several points where the aphorisms of James, Jesus, and Jewish wisdom literature have formal (not necessarily material) resemblances.

These similarities, among other things, have led to the recent burgeoning of scholarship suggesting that Jesus was a wisdom teacher, a Jewish sage.[52] But Jesus did

not just echo the traditional wisdom of other Jewish sages. Much of what is found in traditional Jewish wisdom is absent from both the teaching of Jesus and James.[53] Furthermore, not only was his overall message of the presence and imminence of the kingdom unique, many of his specific ethical instructions were unique as well or, at least, not known elsewhere in Jewish literature. But curiously, some of these *are* known in James. The most outstanding example is the prohibition against swearing (Matt 5:34-37; Jas 5:12). The similarity here is very evident:

James 5:12	Matt 5:34-35, 37
Above all, my brothers, do not swear —not by heaven or by earth or by anything else.	But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. . . .
Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.	Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Though some Jewish wisdom literature warned of the dangers of taking oaths (Eccl 5:4; Sir 23:9-13), none prohibited it entirely. Only 2 Enoch 49:1 resembles the statements of James and Jesus, and most scholars view this as a Christian interpolation.

Baasland rightly observes that James's wisdom is decidedly drawn from the Jesus tradition. Where James reflects traditional Jewish wisdom, those aspects of Jewish wisdom are also found in Jesus' teaching. On the other hand, wherever James differs from Jewish wisdom tradition, he is demonstrably at one with the preaching of Jesus.[54] This is true even though James never quotes any saying of Jesus as found in the Gospels.[55] What seems to be the case is rather that James is either writing prior to the formal solidification of the Greek tradition of Jesus' words, and thus "quoting" in a different form than we have it in the Synoptics, or (more likely) he is paraphrasing and reapplying the ethical teaching of Jesus.[56]

Reinforcing Baasland's opinion is the work of Bauckham, who notes five highly distinctive characteristics of Jesus' teaching that are echoed by James: (1) Radical ethics, (2) the rejection of social stratification, (3) eschatological judgment, not social advantage, as the criterion for right and wrong, (4) God's mercy as of greater importance than his distributive justice, and (5) the concern for renewing and reconstituting Israel as God's people.[57] Just naming them here, I think, is sufficient for the reader familiar with both the Gospels and the Epistle of James to notice the similarity.

All this is to show that wisdom for James is what it was for Jesus—it involved both the hearing and the doing of Jesus' words. According to Jesus, it is the *wise* man who built his house upon a rock, and is like the one who "hears these words of mine and does them." And this further demonstrates the essential Christianity of James. While Paul refers to Christ himself as the wisdom of God (Col 2:3), James understands the teaching of Jesus to be wisdom, and Jesus as the ultimate sage, along the lines already suggested by the passage found in Matthew 12:41-42 and Luke 11:31-32: "the Queen of the South... came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one

greater than Solomon is here."

If the goal of wisdom is the formation of character[58] then certainly James is wisdom. And his unique interest in the practical application of the moral instruction of Jesus, and his frequent use of aphoristic style, may very well earn his epistle the epithet, "the wisdom book of the New Testament,"[59] so long as it is clear that it is a *New Testament* wisdom, and that this wisdom is addressed not to hypothetical, but real *church* situations. Inasmuch as Jesus himself used Jewish wisdom (both its form and content), it ought not surprise us that Jewish wisdom tradition was taken over in the Jewish church. Thus there certainly is no need to suppose that James was originally a non-Christian wisdom piece that was later Christianized, nor is there good reason to think that James was not explicitly Christian. True, the great Pauline issues of christology and redemptive history do not arise much in James (only peeking out from passages like 1:18, 2:1 and 5:8), but no writing should ever be judged for what it does *not* say. Rather James ought to help us expand our notion of what is characteristically Christian. Without James, much of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus might have been lost. James reminds us that the essential matter is not hearing or understanding the word of Jesus, but doing it. That is his wisdom.

ENDNOTES

[1] Cf. H. Conzelmann, "Wisdom in the New Testament," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplementary Volume* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) 960: "the entire letter of James is a wisdom document in parenetic style." C. F. G. Heinrici (*Der Literarische Charakter der Neutestamentlichen Schriften* [Leipzig, 1908] 75, cited in Baasland, "Der Jakobusbrief Als Neutestamentliche Weisheitsschrift," *Studia Theologica* 36 [1982] 123) likened the relationship to that between Revelation and other Jewish apocalyptic: "Der Brief [Jakobus] verhält sich zu den alttestamentlichen Spruchbuchern ebenso wie die Offenbarung des Johannes zu der Apoka-lyptik des Spätjudentums."

[2] L. Massebieau, "L'épître de Jacques, Est-Elle l'Oeuvre d'un Chrétien?" *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 16/32 (1895) 249-83; F. Spitta, *Zur Geschichte und Litteratur Des Urchristentums II* (Göttingen: Vanden-hoeck & Ruprecht, 1896) 382-391.

[3] J. H. Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1916) Introduction Section 2; M. Dibelius, *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, ed. and rev. H. Greeven, trans. Michael A. Williams (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 1-11.

[4] J. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, rev. and enlarged (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 20-30.

[5] Crenshaw, 15.

[6] W. Zimmerli, "Concerning the Structure of Old Testament Wisdom," in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, ed. James Crenshaw (New York: Ktav, 1976) 177.

[7] Crenshaw, 51.

[8] Baasland, 123-124.

[9] B. R. A. Halson, "The Epistle of James: 'Christian Wisdom?'," *Texte und Untersuchungen* 102 (1968) 309.

[10] Such illustrative language is, of course, not limited to Jewish wisdom. James's illustrative grab bag has parallels in Greek moral literature as well, leading Ropes and Dibelius to think of James as primarily a hellenistic Greek work

(Ropes, Introduction Sec. 2; Dibelius, 1-11), but it still stands as one more similarity to Jewish as well as other wisdom literature.

[11]The use of great OT personalities as exemplars is common in Jewish wisdom; cf. e.g., Sir 44:1-49:16.

[12]Cf. also F. C. Fensham, "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature" in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, 161-173.

[13]Baasland, p. 124, adds a third similarity in thought patterns: A person is not regarded as an isolated entity but is always part of a given set of social connections. However, this appears to me to be hardly peculiar to wisdom literature—it runs throughout the Bible—and indeed if anything it is somewhat lessened in the later wisdom books.

[14]P. H. Davids, "The Epistle of James in Modern Discussion," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, Part 2, *Principat*, ed. W. Haase (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 1988) 25:3635.

[15]Halson, 311.

[16]D. E. Gowan, "Wisdom and Endurance in James" *Horizons of Biblical Theology* 15 no. 2 (1993) 145-153.

[17]D. J. Verseput, "Wisdom, 4Q185, and the Epistle of James," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 no. 4 (1998) 691-707.

[18]Verseput, 692.

[19]U. Luck, "Die Theologie Des Jakobusbriefes," *Zeitschrift für Theologie u. Kirche* 81 (1984) 1-30. Luck argues that James does, however, differ from Paul in still holding to the Jewish wisdom notion that a person's identity lies in what he does.

[20]Proverbs does use a similar address, but it is from the vantage point of a father ("my son") rather than of a sibling ("beloved brothers"). Ropes calls it "utterly different" (Ropes, 17).

[21]Cf. below on the ethical nature of wisdom.

[22]Cf. W. Bindemann, "Weisheit Versus Weisheit: Der Jakobusbrief Als Innerkirchlicher Diskurs," *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 86 (1995) 216.

[23]Crenshaw, 27.

[24]These generic differences from other Jewish wisdom texts are precisely why J. H. Ropes and M. Dibelius found James to be generically much closer to Greek forms of hortatory literature.

[25]It is curious that even Ropes himself points out so many marked differences between James and Greek diatribes (Ropes, 15-16) that one wonders why he stuck with calling James a diatribe. Given Dibelius's inability to provide any *positive* characteristics for an ostensible genre of paraenesis other than the use of *Stichworten*, and the paucity of evidence for paraenesis as a *generic form*, as opposed to a rhetorical device, we must also conclude that Dibelius too has failed to find any convincing generic model in hellenism. (Dibelius's only other characteristics of paraenesis are negative, such as the lack of organization, and the lack of continuity of thought. And as he himself shows, the use of catchwords is so common in much Jewish literature that their use can hardly be called evidence for paraenesis being a distinct *genre.*) Dibelius, 1-11.

[26]Indeed the entire rest of the book of Wisdom of Solomon may be intended to be read as the prayer of Solomon. Note the continued use of the second person throughout the book.

[27]P. Hartin, *James and the Q Sayings of Jesus* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplementary Series; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) 97. Though his chiastic analysis of 2:1-5:6 is rather forced, it is no doubt true that at least the gaining of true wisdom from God by humbly asking for it in submission to God is a major concern of James.

[28]V. 14 (NIV: "if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth"). The implication is that to boast of one's wisdom, to be proud of knowing truth, is to belie the very truth one professes to know, since that truth includes the fact that if one has wisdom, it is purely by grace. Cf. F. Mussner, *Der Jakobusbrief*, 3rd ed. (Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament XIII; Freiburg, 1975) 171. Teachers in the churches should read this verse twice a day until they take it to heart. Pride at one's knowledge is as much the source of much strife in our day as in James's day, and is no product of true wisdom (v.16).

[29]Instead of the proud self-serving wisdom of the guru, James advocates the humble wisdom of Jesus who was himself humble (Matt 11:29) but nevertheless spoke a wisdom that demanded a great deal of

his hearers (P. H. Davids, *Commentary on James* [NIGNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982] 209).

[30]U. Wilckens, "*sophia*, etc." in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 7:524-525.

[31]S. Laws points out that James actually avoids referring to this "earthly" thing as "wisdom." S. Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980) 163. There is only one wisdom, and that which is contentious, self-seeking, and boastful is not it.

[32]W. R. Baker, *Personal Speech-Ethics in the Epistle of James* (Tubingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1995).

[33]This seems to be the particular contribution of Sirach 24, particularly vv. 23-24. Later Judaism adopts this idea generally, e.g., *Pirqe Aboth* vi.7 gives a series of attributes of Torah, which in Proverbs are a description of wisdom. *Genesis Rabbah begins* with the words of Prov 8:30, and applies it to Torah: By looking into Torah, God created the world. Cf. also Bar 3:9-4:4.

[34]If there is such a thing as a "wisdom" psalm, Psalm 19 is surely it, moving from the creation theology of vv. 1-6 to the praise of God's law for its guidance and protection in vv. 7-10 to the warning and safety of Torah, which uncovers what is hidden, in vv. 11-13.

[35]It is likely that the "royal law" refers to Lev 19:18 quoted in James. The commandment is a royal (*basilikon*) law probably because it is connected with the kingdom (*basileia*) of 2:5, which may in turn have roots in Jesus' proclamation of "the kingdom of God" (*tēs basileias tou theou*) (cf. Jesus' comment to the scribe who acknowledged this command that he was "not far from the kingdom of God" [Mark 12:34]). A passage from the Wisdom of Solomon shows well how Judaism related the notions of Torah, wisdom, and kingdom: "The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her, and love of her is the keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality, and immortality brings one near to God; so the desire for wisdom leads to kingdom" (Wis 6:17-20; the translation is that of P. Hartin, in *James and the Q Sayings of Jesus*, 92).

[36]Luck, 17.

[37]It seems to me inherently much more sensible to take *en prautēti*, "in humility," not with *apothemenoi*, "laying aside," (as the punctuation in NA27 suggests) but with the following *dexasthe*, "receive." Thus v. 21 is not a tautologous "receive what you have received" but instruction on *how* to receive that which has been implanted, a sentiment echoed in 3:13.

[38]It has been suggested that this may be an *agraphon*, a saying of Jesus that was known to be such in the early church, but not written down and specifically attributed to him.

[39]T. Penner, *The Epistle of James and Eschatology: Re-reading an Ancient Christian Letter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

[40]Certainly by the second century B.C., all or almost all of the books in the Hebrew Bible were known and regarded as authoritative by all Jews, so that Jewish wisdom teachers such as ben Sirach, Baruch, 4 Maccabees and Ps-Phocylides drew freely from Law, Prophecy, and Apocalyptic as sources for the divine wisdom as much as the Wisdom literature.

[41]R. Bauckham, *James: The Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (New York; London: Routledge, 1999) 34.

[42]Hartin, 64-69.

[43]Whatever that enigmatic verse 5 in ch.4 means, I, along with most commentators, think it highly improbable that the "spirit" is the Holy Spirit, whether or not it is the subject of *epipothei* ("desires"). The best option is to give *pneuma* here the same meaning it has in its only other occurrence in James (2:26), namely the vivifying breath of life, a meaning common in wisdom literature (Job 27:3, 33:4, 34:14-15, Wis 12:1, Eccl 1:14, 2:11, 4:4 etc., cf. also Gen 2:2, 7:15, Isa 2:22).

[44]J. A. Kirk, "The Meaning of Wisdom in James: Examination of a Hypothesis," *New Testament Studies* 16 (1969) 24-38.

[45]The best explanation for "Father of lights" is as creator of the heavenly lights of Genesis 1. As creator of lights he is source of all light, and hence cannot be shadowed or darkened or mistaken. Referring to the creator as "Father" personalizes the creator's relationship even to the non-human world, much as God's relationship is personalized in wisdom literature by the personification of wisdom itself, which is deeply involved in creation.

[46]J. A. Davis, *Wisdom and Spirit : An Investigation of 1 Corinthians 1.18-3.20 Against the Background of Jewish Sapiential Traditions in the Greco-Roman Period* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984).

[47]P. H. Davids, *Commentary on James*, 55-56.

[48]Mussner, 48-50.

[49]G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Century of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (New York: Schocken, 1927) 1:467-468.

[50]Bauckham, 37-47.

[51]D. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987).

[52]B. Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994) 236-244; R. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) 2-3. Witherington thinks that James only used the traditionalist "orderly" parts of Jesus teaching, or misunderstood Jesus in a traditionalist direction, and failed to grasp Jesus' "counter-order" teaching (244-246). But Bauckham, pp. 94-95, thinks this may stem from Witherington's prejudicial construal of the nature of Jesus teaching, and suggests that, instead of "counter-order" versus order construal, it is better to speak of kingdom teaching, which does not fit into either category.

[53]Cf. Bauckham, 95, who then goes on to list several missing instructions, e.g., exhortations to work hard, advice on what kind of friends to have, good and bad wives, and raising of children.

[54]Baasland, p. 126, "Was Jk von der jüdischen Weisheitsliteratur unterscheidet, verbindet Jk mit der Verkündingung Jesu. In der neueren Forschung ist es klarer geworden, dass auch übernommene Weisheitsworte durch die Verkündigung vom Reich Gottes und der eigenen Person in einem anderen Licht erscheinen."

[55]This is one reason why Hartin's view (*James and the Q Sayings of Jesus*) of James's *direct* dependence on Q is not convincing. See R. Bauckham's review of Hartin in *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1993) 298-301.

[56]This would apply as well if any of the sayings in James suspected of being *agrapha* are in fact such. These possible *agrapha* are generally of the form of a wisdom saying that is unknown outside the church. 5:12 is an example of a *known* saying of Jesus that has been brought forward by James, that also occurs in Matthew (I assume here that the saying in Matthew 7 is an authentic *verbum Christi*). The sayings in James 4:17, 5:20, 3:18 sound like they could be references to traditional teaching stemming from Jesus.

[57]Bauckham, 97-107.

[58]Crenshaw, 3.

[59]Baasland, 124