

THE MAIN THEME AND STRUCTURE OF JAMES

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The Letter of James has played an important role in the expository and polemical ministry of John MacArthur. In addition to his commentary on James, Dr. MacArthur has utilized James 2 in The Gospel According to the Apostles as a lynchpin in his argument about true saving faith. The theme and structure of James is offered in appreciation for his ministry that has always stressed, like James, the authenticity of saving faith.

For over four centuries, discussion about the structure of James' letter could be referred to as commentary on "A German Tale of Two Martins." Those two influential Germans were Martin Luther in the sixteenth century and Martin Dibelius in the twentieth century. Both could see no coherent structure in this book. While there were others who voiced exception to the views of the two Martins, their pervasive influence has certainly dominated the discussion for far too long!

Luther's comment about James being "an epistle of straw," as compared to the theological significance of Paul's writings, is his most well-known comment on the book.¹ His views about the style and structure of James, however, were equally negative. Discounting apostolic authorship, Luther concluded that the author must have been "some good, pious man, who took a few sayings from the disciples of the apostles and thus tossed them off on paper."² Even if we discount his anachronistic comment about paper, since that medium was not invented until the late Middle Ages, his stinging indictment of James' style remains. To Luther this letter was not written by James the Lord's brother, and it is totally disorganized in its presentation of the few sayings he did borrow from the apostles.

Furthermore, in his erudite commentary, Martin Dibelius concluded from his form critical analysis that James contained no overall thematic or

¹ Luther's expression could be more literally rendered "a right strawy epistle" (*eyn rechte stroern Epistel*). *Luther's Works* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1972), 35: 362. Hereafter referred to as *LW*.

² *LW*, 35: 397.

structural unity.³ He did acknowledge that three individual treatises (2:1-13; 2:14-26; 3:1-13), which he called “the core of the writing,” were fairly coherent in their diatribal style. But the rest of the book, however, was primarily composed of loosely arranged sayings, sometimes connected by catch words, in the style of what Dibelius referred to as Jewish paraenesis.⁴ Dibelius’ influence on later writers is undeniable and pervasive.⁵

Among recent writers who have discerned some measure of coherence in the epistle’s structure, many often stress the key role of chapter one in serving as a sort of “table of contents” for the rest of the book.⁶ Others have argued more specifically that 1:19 (“be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger”) comprises a three-point outline of chapters 2-4.⁷ Despite this recent trend toward seeing greater coherence, Taylor and Guthrie recently concluded that “no consensus has emerged concerning the details of the book’s organization.”⁸

³ M. Dibelius, *James*, rev. H. Greeven; trans. M. A. Williams (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 34-38.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-10.

⁵ For discussions by various writers on the literary structure and genre of James, see L.T. Johnson, *The Letter of James AB* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 37A:11-25; P. H. Davids, “The Epistle of James in Modern Discussion,” *ANRW II* (25:5): 3621-45; M. E. Taylor, “Recent Scholarship on the Structure of James,” *CBR* 3:1 (2004): 86-115.

⁶ Johnson, *James*, 15; R. Bauckham, *James* (London: Routledge, 1999), 68-73. Bauckham, however, along with Moo observe that the great diversity among the proposed structures for the epistle may indicate that there is no clearly discernible structure to the book. Moo opts for “an overall concern” rather than a structured theme. That concern is James’ desire for spiritual “wholeness.” D. J. Moo, *The Letter of James* in PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 44, 46.

⁷ An early advocate of this approach was H. J. Cladder, “Die Anlage des Jakobusbriefes,” *ZTK* 28 (1904): 37-57. More recent advocates are Z. C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing* (Dallas: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994) and R. W. Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* in NTC (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1997), 35-37.

⁸ M. E. Taylor and G. H. Guthrie, “The Structure of James,” *CBQ* 68:4 (2006): 681-705. Taylor and Guthrie’s approach recognizes the role of “organizing principles” such as the double opening section, the presence of inclusios, the use of aphorisms, and the presence of summary expressions. Their conclusions leave an epistle that has a very long introduction and body opening (1:1-2:11) plus an equally long body closing and conclusion (4:13-5:20), enclosing a body proper consisting only of 2:12-4:12. In addition to the book thus having a body shorter than its opening and conclusion, their analysis seems to have so many organizing principles that very little in the book is actually prominent since so many individual elements are supposed to be prominent. I have coined the expression *über analysis* for this tendency to over analyze a text by imagining too many literary characteristics. Furthermore, their lack of discerning one controlling theme in the midst of such an involved analysis is a considerable weakness of their proposal. I have chosen to comment on Taylor and Guthrie’s approach because it illustrates what so many have failed to accomplish in their proposals about the book’s structure: an analysis based on all that the text teaches that enables the reader to form a mental representation of the discourse in as simple a way as the discourse allows. For the most recent scholarly efforts in this area, see the thorough study by L. Cheung, *The Genre, Composition and Hermeneutics of the Epistle of James* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2003) and M. E. Taylor, *A Text-Linguistic Investigation into the Discourse Structure of James* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

With so many differences about the book's structure among scholars past and present, what hope is there that we can ever discern an overarching strategy in its composition? Or, should we just conclude that there is no evident overall strategy and be satisfied with arranging by intuition James' discrete topics in a linear list? I am convinced that an analysis of this book that gives attention both to how authors indicate prominence and to how they group their messages offers fresh hope that we can then uncover the structure of this little book which actually helps to convey its overall message.

A PROPOSAL ABOUT JAMES 3:13-18

By applying the techniques of *cohesion*, *prominence*, *peak*, and *grouping* to the text of James, I propose that James 3:13-18 is the peak of his discourse. And as the peak, this crucial passage highlights the primary concerns of the author. How does James focus his spotlight on this section and give it the foreground prominence over other sections of his discourse? I have leaned heavily on the insights on prominence developed by Stanley Porter and the insights on peak developed by Robert Longacre. These scholars have pioneered this approach in their formidable works on linguistics and Biblical interpretation.⁹

This section (3:13-18) fits all the expectations for its being *dissimilar* to the rest of James' encyclical letter. In other words it sticks out as a *peak* from the surrounding hills of the letter. It functions as the most prominent section of the book, and is like a "zone of turbulence" compared to the other important but less prominent sections. Longacre's often cited comment about a discourse without prominence is also appropriate here. "The very idea of discourse as a structured entity demands that some parts of discourse be more prominent than others. Otherwise, expression would be impossible. Discourse without prominence would be like pointing to a piece of black cardboard and insisting that it was a picture of black camels crossing black sands at midnight."¹⁰

Here is the text of James 3:13-18 in Greek and English:

<p>3:13 Τίς σοφός καὶ ἐπιστήμων ἐν ὑμῖν; δειξάτω ἐκ τῆς καλῆς ἀναστροφῆς τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ἐν πραύτητι σοφίας. 14 εἰ δὲ ζῆλον πικρὸν ἔχετε καὶ ἐριθείαν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν, μὴ κατακαυχᾶσθε καὶ</p>	<p>Jas 3¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? He should demonstrate by his good conduct his actions done with the gentleness that wisdom brings. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter</p>
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⁹ For thorough treatments by these two authors, see S. E. Porter, *Discourse Analysis and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming), and *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 298-307; R. E. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse*, 2nd ed. (London: Plenum Press, 1996).

¹⁰ "Discourse Peak as Zone of Turbulence," in *Beyond the Sentence: Discourse and Sentential Form*, ed. J.R. Wirth (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma, 1985), 83.

ψεύδεσθε κατὰ τῆς ἀληθείας. **15** οὐκ ἔστιν αὕτη ἢ σοφία ἄνωθεν κατερχομένη ἀλλὰ ἐπίγειος, ψυχική, δαιμονιώδης. **16** ὅπου γὰρ ζῆλος καὶ ἐριθεία, ἐκεῖ ἀκαταστασία καὶ πᾶν φαῦλον πρᾶγμα. **17** ἡ δὲ ἄνωθεν σοφία πρῶτον μὲν ἀγνή ἐστιν, ἔπειτα εἰρηνική, ἐπιεικής, εὐπειθής, μεστή ἐλέους καὶ καρπῶν ἀγαθῶν, ἀδιάκριτος, ἀνυπόκριτος. **18** καρπὸς δὲ δικαιοσύνης ἐν εἰρήνῃ σπείρεται τοῖς ποιῶσιν εἰρήνην.¹¹

jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, stop boasting and being false to the truth.¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, it is there that will be disorder and every vile practice.¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who work for peace.

Consider the following unique linguistic characteristics of this passage that illustrate what Longacre has described as the chief characteristics of “peak.” Stating them, they are: general dissimilarity from the co-text; rhetorical underlining; concentration of participants; heightened vividness; change of pace; and change of vantage point.

1. The section begins with a question: Τίς σοφὸς καὶ ἐπιστήμων ἐν ὑμῖν; (“Who is a wise and undersanding person among you?”). As will be noted later, other sections of James begin with the combination of a nominative plural in direct address with an imperative verb. The only other exception to this is 4:1-10, which also begins with a question: Πόθεν πόλεμοι καὶ πόθεν μάχαι ἐν ὑμῖν; (“From where among you do wars and battles come?”). This section is so closely related to 3:13-18 that it illustrates rather than contradicts the unique role of 3:13-18. I argue that 4:7-10 functions as the “hortatory” peak of the discourse while 3:13-18 is its “thematic” peak.

2. The initial imperative shifts to the third person from the second person pattern of the other sections: δεῖξάτω ἐκ τῆς καλῆς ἀναστροφῆς τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ἐν πραύτητι σοφίας. (“Let him show from his good behavior his good works with meekness of wisdom”). Although there are fifteen third-person imperatives in James, this is the only instance when one appears at the beginning of its section in the

¹¹ K. Aland, M. Black, C.M. Martini, B.M. Metzger, M. Robinson, & A. Wikgren, eds. *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. with Morphology. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993; 2006).

thematic position of the clause. The others form supportive material by appearing later in the clause or the section in the rhematic position.¹²

3. There are vice and virtue lists marked by asyndeton. These lists do not appear elsewhere in James. 3:15 refers to: ἐπίγειος, ψυχική, δαιμονιώδης (“earthly, sensual, devilish”). 3:17 mentions: πρῶτον μὲν ἀγνή ἐστίν, ἔπειτα εἰρηνική, ἐπεικίης, εὐπειθής, μεστή ἐλέους καὶ καρπῶν ἀγαθῶν, ἀδιάκριτος, ἀνυπόκριτος (“it is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, sincere”). These lists describe polar opposite behaviors that contrast the kind of “wisdom that does **not** descend from above” (οὐκ ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ σοφία ἄνωθεν κατερχομένη) with that behavior that exemplifies “wisdom that is from above” (ἡ δὲ ἄνωθεν σοφία). Again, in the later analysis of how this passage contributes to the structure of James, it will be noted that the polar opposite behaviors it describes provides the overall theme of the discourse which can be mapped onto every separate section.¹³

4. There is a marked difference in the ratio of adjectives to other words in this section. The ratio of adjectives to other words in this section is 20%. The ratio of adjectives to other words in the rest of the book is 10%. This is consistent with the author’s purpose in this peak paragraph to describe the behavior that is evidence of the wisdom that he is commending throughout the book. The large number of adjectives describes what the wise person looks like so the readers will seek to emulate the behavior of such a person.

5. There is a change of vantage point in this section. In other sections, the readers are directly addressed about their behavior. Here by way of a rhetorical question the readers are asked to consider what the behavior of a wise person is like (and an unwise person as well). In contrast, the other questions in the letter are used in the confrontational diatribes by which James challenges his readers (note the series of questions in 2:4-7 and 2:14, 16, 20, 21). While specific exemplars of behavior are held up to the readers in other sections (Abraham, Rahab, Job, Elijah), here the readers are asked generally to contemplate the example of a “wise person.” Those other exemplars are living examples

¹² *Theme* and *rheme* are terms used to describe the initial position in the clause or sentence (the *theme*) and what is later stated about the theme (the *rheme*). For James’ second person imperatives in thematic position, see 1:2; 16, 19; 2:1, 5; 3:1; 4:11, 13; 5:1, 7, 9. For the supportive third person imperatives in rhematic position, see 1:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 13, 19; 4:9; 5:12, 13 (2), 14, 20. For a simple explanation of *theme* and *rheme* in both clause and text, see Geoff Thompson, *Introducing Functional Grammar* (London: Arnold, 1994), 143, 164-73.

¹³ Commentators have recognized that these polar contrasts play a major role in James’ letter. See Johnson, *James*, 83, 84. Other authors who have discerned these bi-polar contrasts will be mentioned later.

from Israel's sacred history of the wise person held up for emulation in this section.

6. Summary words in this section appear in significant ways elsewhere in James. The specific examples of the commended and condemned behaviors show up in supportive material in many other sections. No other section of the discourse contributes so much of its vocabulary to the other sections as 3:13-18. While this may appear to contradict the idea of dissimilarity, I remind the reader that while dissimilarity marks the surface features of James, semantic similarity and summary mark this passage.¹⁴ This would be similar to Longacre's "crowded stage" in which all the characters appear at crucial times. Consider a sampling of some of these lexical connections with both the preceding (anaphoric) and succeeding (cataphoric) sections of the discourse. "Wisdom" in 3:13, 15 looks back to 1:5. "Let him show" in 3:13 echoes 2:18b. "Works" in 3:13 summarizes his previous discussion in 2:14-26 (and interestingly does not appear again after its use here). The "meekness" of 3:13 recalls its use in 1:21. The wisdom "from above" in 3:15, 17 echoes the gifts that come from above in 1:17. Not only does this language look back to the previous co-text, it looks forward as well. The bitter "jealousy" of 3:14 anticipates the same problem condemned in 4:2. The warning "not to boast" in 3:14 previews the same problem in 4:16. These lexical connections are only a sample of those that are present in this passage. Furthermore, the many additional semantic parallels have not even been mentioned and can be easily discovered by simple searches on shared theme words. Enough of them have been noted to illustrate the crucial function of this section as a summary of the entire discourse.

These six examples of the uniqueness and *dissimilarity* of 3:13-18 highlight its prominent role in the discourse as a whole. There are abundant illustrations in this section of the above-mentioned characteristics of Longacre's "peak" – the rhetorical underlining, the concentration of participants, the heightened vividness, the change of pace, and the change of vantage point.

These characteristics also convey the "message" that James wants readers to understand, namely, that there are *two ways* that they can follow: the way of heavenly wisdom or the way of earthly wisdom. This thematic peak is what controls our author's approach in the individual paragraphs of his discourse. In each paragraph, a moral behavior is commended and the opposite behavior is condemned. The reader is called to make a choice between these two

¹⁴ "By their nature, summary statements unite together the information they summarize." Steven Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2000), 277. They can both end and begin sections. Here the lists both look back and look forward in the text.

ways. In the following section (4:1-10), James challenges his readers to become either a friend of God or his enemy in 4:4: μοιχαλίδες, οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ἡ φιλία τοῦ κόσμου ἔχθρα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν; ὃς ἐὰν οὖν βουληθῆ φίλος εἶναι τοῦ κόσμου, ἐχθρὸς τοῦ θεοῦ καθίσταται (“Adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever desires to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”). This paradigm of two opposite behaviors is stamped on every paragraph/section of the discourse.

Recognizing the thematic peak of James and how it provides the overall thrust of his message enables his readers to understand why James wants them to be “perfect” (τέλειοι – 1:4). This important term, echoing our Lord’s statement in Matthew 5:48, is defined by the rest of 1:4 as follows: καὶ ὁλόκληροι ἐν μηδενὶ λειπόμενοι (“and entire, not lacking in anything”). Many writers have noticed the way in which James describes this perfection or “wholeness” that should characterize his readers.¹⁵ If they try to have it both ways, then they will be guilty of “doubleness,” described by the colorful and unique word δίψυχος (1:8; 4:8) – a “double-souled” or “double-minded” person. To James, the wisdom described in 3:13-18 that comes from above to those who ask God for it (1:5) will be displayed in fruitful deeds. This wisdom also will enable his readers to be whole people in their undivided devotion to the one true God who Himself has no “variation or shadow due to change” (1:17).

SCHOLARS ON THE ROLE OF 3:13–18 IN THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF JAMES

Previously we have argued that this paragraph has the prominent role in the overall structure of the Letter from James. This is due to its special linguistic features that set it apart from other paragraphs, along with its semantic function of conveying the essential message of the entire discourse. The paragraph has verbal links with both previous and subsequent material, thus serving as a transitional section, but also functioning as a summation of the entire discourse. Therefore, here we will expand on the crucial role of this paragraph which we have called the thematic “peak” of James, and see if other scholars have discerned the important role of this section.

Dibelius thought that 3:13-17 had internal cohesion but had no real connections with what precedes or follows in the letter. He also thought that 3:18 was an isolated saying, belonging neither with the previous group and separate from 4:1ff.¹⁶ It can be shown, however, that Dibelius was simply wrong in this estimation. It is my opinion that he allowed his view that James is

¹⁵ P. J. Hartin considers this goal as the essence of the book’s teaching on the spiritual life. *A Spirituality of Perfection* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999). Bauckham calls perfection or wholeness “the overarching theme of the entire letter.” R. Bauckham, *James*, 177.

¹⁶ Dibelius, *James*, 207-8.

composed of loosely arranged paranetic material to sometimes negatively influence his critical judgment. A number of writers both before and after Dibelius have affirmed the unity of this paragraph and its vital verbal and semantic connection both to its immediate co-text and also to the distant sections of the discourse.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, two other German scholars argued for the central role of 3:13-18. C.F.G. Henrici, in a volume on the literary character of the NT writings, acknowledged that James, like the proverbial writings of the OT, consisted of a large number of discrete sections of familiar wisdom material. There was, however, something that held all the variant sayings together.

Der zusammenhaltende Gedanke ist die Einsharfung der rechten Weisheit, die von oben kommt (3, 13-18). Alle einzelnen Warheiten sind ihre Fruchte.¹⁷ [The connecting thought is the emphasis on the true wisdom, which comes from above (3:13-18). All of the other individual truths are its fruits.]

In an earlier article, Herman Cladder also set forth a strong argument for literary coherence in the book, with 3:13-18 also functioning as both its linguistic and semantic center.¹⁸ Dibelius greatly influenced a succeeding generation of writers, but in the last decades a number not only have found a coherent structure in James, but also have argued for the over-arching structural and semantic role of 3:13-18. James Reese views 3:13-18 as “the heart of the letter” where its “core message” (the teacher’s awesome responsibility) is located and developed.¹⁹ In a number of books and articles, Patrick Hartin has “argued that this (3:13-18) is the central pericope in the epistle, the other pericopes forming an embrace around it.”²⁰ Luke Cheung has stressed the central function of 3:13-18 as a link passage in the book which many of the previous and subsequent paragraphs echo both linguistically and thematically.²¹

In a published dissertation utilizing a form of discourse analysis, Mark Taylor affirms that this passage summarizes the burden of the letter thus far and prepares the way for the strong rebuke that follows. These anaphoric and cataphoric roles of the passage lead him to the same conclusion as these

¹⁷ C. F. G. Henrici, *Der literarische Charakter der neutestamentliche Schriften* (Leipzig: Durr, 1908), 75.

¹⁸ H. Cladder, “Die Anlage des Jakobusbriefes,” *ZKT* 28 (1904): 37-57.

¹⁹ J.M. Reese, “The Exegete as Sage: Hearing the Message of James,” *BTB* 12 (1982): 83.

²⁰ P.J. Hartin, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” *SBLSP* (1996): 483. See also *James and the ‘Q’ Sayings of Jesus*, JSNTSup 47 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 29-32; and *A Spirituality of Perfection*, 72-75.

²¹ L. L. Cheung, *The Genre*, 75-85, 138-47.

aforementioned writers. Functionally, 3:13-18 gathers key concepts raised in 1:2-3:12 and anticipates the next major movement in the discourse. Contextually, the passage reveals grounding in Jewish concepts of wisdom, emphasizing the practical obedience of a life marked by the possession of wisdom as a gift of God.²²

In an unpublished thesis, David Hockman views our passage as the discourse “peak” of the book, while Kenneth Tollefson also stresses the key role of the paragraph in the dialectical discourse of James.²³ Suffice it to conclude that a number of scholars have also affirmed that 3:13-18 is the key to pulling the seemingly disparate sections of James together into some coherent structure.

Such a conclusion, however, cannot be based simply on the linguistic features in the structural “peak” of the book, although those indicators must be present as well. The semantic content of the paragraph must also convey the main themes of the book for the paragraph to function clearly in a prominent role as the thematic peak of James. I believe that these semantic indicators are also present in this passage. James conveys here his burden that his readers adopt a lifestyle that is based on the wisdom that comes from God above and that they must reject any anti-wisdom that comes from human viewpoint alone. It is my contention that each individual paragraph of the discourse displays the stamp of that theme. The intensely imperative paragraph that follows (4:1-10), for example, reaches a hortatory peak in calling the reader to accept the friendship of God and reject the friendship of the world. In the words of the previous thematic peak, that means to reject the anti-wisdom of this “below” world and to accept the true wisdom of the “above” world. Or the person who may want it both ways, James reserves the stinging message of not being “double-minded,” but choosing rather the wholeness of a single and pure life marked by a moral integrity rooted in divine wisdom.

AN ANALYSIS OF JAMES 3:13–18²⁴

This paragraph opens with a rhetorical question addressed to those “among you” (ἐν ὑμῖν) – the first of six occurrences of this expression, all in the latter half of the book. The next paragraph opens with another challenging rhetorical question asked of those “among you” (ἐν ὑμῖν; 4:1). The remaining four times that this expression occurs are in the closing paragraph (5:13, 14, 19, 20). This indicates that James at this point begins to close in on the fallacies and foibles of congregational lives in the Diaspora. The question in 3:13a is

²² M.E. Taylor, *A Text-Linguistic Investigation*, 116.

²³ D. J. Hockman, “A Discourse Analysis of James: An Examination of 3:13-18 as the Doctrinal Peak” (Th.M. thesis, Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006); K. J. Tollefson, “The Epistle of James as a Dialectical Discourse,” *BTB* 27:2 (1997): 62-69.

²⁴ See the earlier chart containing the Greek and English texts of this passage.

answered immediately by an imperative (δειξάτω) clause that echoes an earlier use of this specific imperative (twice in 2:18) and also echoes the same semantic point, namely that his readers must demonstrate by their right behavior their faith (2:18) and also their wisdom (3:13b). More specifically, it is that gentleness that has its origin in wisdom (σοφίας as a genitive of source). Although this is only the second use of this specific noun (see 1:5), it appears twice in 3:15 and 17, and introduces the topic which will be commented on in the rest of the paragraph. The use of σοφός in the opening question also strengthens the point that wisdom is the topic which will be explained. Coupled with σοφός is the added characteristic, “and understanding” (καὶ ἐπιστήμων). This word does not convey the semantic overtones of a “sympathetic understanding,” but is more in the semantic field of its partner, σοφός. Louw and Nida define this field as “pertaining to being able to understand and evaluate – ‘intelligent, insightful, understanding’.”²⁵ Although this specific combination of words does not appear elsewhere in the NT, the collocation would be familiar to those who honored the wisdom traditions of Israel and the wise men of that tradition. When Moses wondered how he could bear the burden of leading the people, he decided by issuing the following command. “Assign for yourselves men, wise and discerning (σοφούς καὶ ἐπιστήμονας) and prudent for your tribes, and I will appoint them as your leaders” (Deut 1:13). The response of the people was to do just that and such wise and understanding men were so appointed (1:15). In Deuteronomy 4:6 Israel was told that if they kept the statutes, they would be “a wise and understanding (σοφός καὶ ἐπιστήμων) people” – the exact pair of wisdom words found in James 3:13. Daniel was referred to by the same two coupled adjectives (Dan 1:4; 5:11) and *Sirach* also collocates the two words (21:15). Therefore, attending to the intertexture of James suggests that he is asking for one who desires to be a “sage” in ancient Israel. This connects the paragraph to the opening of the previous one where a warning was issued against too many desiring to be teachers (3:1). The teacher was a “rabbi.” The “sage” was one who taught wisdom. The requirement for the rabbi was to be perfect in the use of his tongue (3:2-12). The requirement for the sage is that he demonstrates by his behavior the gentleness that comes from heavenly wisdom (3:13, 17).

The next three verses (3:14-16) introduce a negative tone, because James loves portraying the oppositions of actions in his ethical paranesis. The Jewish “two ways” tradition could also be invoked here, as he describes the characteristics of anti-wisdom by means of a vice list. Many commentators have pointed out that he never calls this behavior a type of wisdom, but he does state that “this is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic” (3:15). He begins his portrayal of anti-wisdom by a first-class conditional sentence in 3:14: “εἰ δὲ ζήλον πικρὸν ἔχετε καὶ ἐριθείαν ἐν τῇ

²⁵ J.P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), I: 384.

καρδία ὑμῶν, μὴ κατακαυχᾶσθε καὶ ψεύδεσθε κατὰ τῆς ἀληθείας.” Too often those trained in traditional grammar settle for a description of the syntax of a first-class conditional clause (εἰ plus the indicative in the protasis) with little recognition for what an author is doing with the conditional clause. Richard Young has framed a rhetorical approach to conditional clauses in light of speech-act theory that focuses on what an author is attempting to do with the clause.²⁶ Here, for example, James is not making a statement, but is engaging in a strong exhortation. Notice the apodosis: “stop boasting and being false to the truth” (μὴ κατακαυχᾶσθε καὶ ψεύδεσθε κατὰ τῆς ἀληθείας). The exhortation is heightened by the adversative δέ that introduces the protasis and contrasts so vividly with “the gentleness that wisdom brings” at the end of the previous clause.

Oftentimes great effort is taken to closely define the nuances of difference in these words. More valuable than seeking to define and contrast each of these negative terms is to see the total disorder and unstable characteristics that emerge from the words in 3:15 and 16. The word “disorder” (ἀκαταστασία) recalls the description of the double-minded man of 1:8 as “unstable” (ἀκατάστατος) and the tongue in 3:8 as “restless” (ἀκατάστατον). Notice also the verbal connections to other sections with the references to “bitter jealousy” (ζῆλον πικρὸν) as in 3:11 and 4:2. This vice list could be summed up as describing confusion and disorder. The vivid contrast of the following virtue list in 3:17 can be seen in the emphasis on peace and harmony conveyed in the words that describe behavior derived from “above.” The English reader cannot appreciate the rhetorical flourishes heard in the original oral reading of the book. There are six consecutive words beginning with epsilon: ἡ δὲ ἄνωθεν σοφία πρῶτον μὲν ἀγνή ἐστιν, ἔπειτα εἰρηνικὴ, ἐπιεικὴς, εὐπειθής, μεστὴ ἐλέους. Then there are three words initiated by an alpha: ἀγαθῶν, ἀδιάκριτος, ἀνυπόκριτος. This careful alliteration contrasts graphically with the vice list which had no such alliteration. The contrast in the sound also sent a message of the difference between the behavioral disharmony from below and the harmonious order from above.

The final clause in 3:18 is close enough in sense to be properly placed but different enough to indicate its separate origin (note the unnecessary δέ). It is used here as an aphorism which rounds off the effective argument and transitions in thought to the following passage. This can be seen in its reference to peace-making, which is a fruit of the wisdom from above and is in contrast with the “wars” that characterize the admonition in 4:1ff. The participle τοῖς ποιοῦσιν most probably is a dative of agency: “And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace *by those who make (or work for) peace.*” The appropriate

²⁶ R.A. Young, “A Classification of Conditional Sentences Based on Speech Act Theory,” *GTJ* 10, n.1 (1989): 29-49.

intertext is undoubtedly the beatitude of Jesus in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

It is unnecessary to explain further how this passage conveys the message of the book. This paragraph is the message of the book.

JAMES 3:13 AND THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF JAMES

We have previously applied the topics of prominence and grouping and suggested the idea of discourse "peak" in the role of foreground prominence. We then called attention to James 3:13-18 and its appeal to divine and human wisdom as polar contrasts that focuses James' call to his readers to choose the lifestyle of a "friend of God." By recognizing this thematic peak, a reader can also better develop a mental representation of the entire discourse. "By reducing the flow of the texts to polar opposites, dialectical discourse not only clarifies the issues; it also serves as an aid to memory."²⁷

How does this overall approach (from top down) view the book in its parts (from bottom up)? I suggest that the combination of imperative commands with nominatives of direct address (most often ἀδελφοί, "brothers") is the grammatical/cohesive tie that James utilizes to group his discourse into sections. This approach involves more than just noticing a repeated lexical device and seizing on it as a key. Each discrete section, introduced in this way, signals a new group of semantically related information as well. The thematic second person imperative in each section serves as the central clause with the following indicative clauses and/or clause complexes providing support for the mainline imperatival command. There may be additional imperatives (often in the third person) that expand further the command of the central clause/sentence and are then further supported by a series of indicative clauses. The main thrust of each section, in accord with the overall theme in the discourse peak in 3:13-18, is an appeal to readers to follow the divine viewpoint ("wisdom from above") by obeying the imperatival command that he has delivered. Consequently, his readers are exhorted to reject any human viewpoint ("wisdom not from above") about the ethical demands in the section.

²⁷ Tollefson, "The Epistle of James," 63.

According to this proposal, the main sections of the book can be displayed as follows.

Sections of James		
Section	Nominative of Address	Imperative Command/ Rhetorical Question
1:2-15	ἀδελφοί μου	Πᾶσαν χαρὰν ἡγήσασθε
1:16-18	ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί	Μὴ πλανᾶσθε
1:19-27	ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί	Ἵστε plus ἔστω
2:1-13	ἀδελφοί μου	μὴ ἐν προσωπολημψίαις ἔχετε
2:14-26	ἀδελφοί μου	Τί τὸ ὄφελος
3:1-12	ἀδελφοί μου	Μὴ πολλοὶ διδάσκαλοι γίνεσθε
3:13-18	ἐν ὑμῖν THEMATIC PEAK	Τίς σοφὸς καὶ ἐπιστήμων
4:1-10	ἐν ὑμῖν HORTATORY PEAK	Πόθεν πόλεμοι καὶ πόθεν μάχαι 10 imperatives in 4:7-10
4:11-12	ἀδελφοί μου	Μὴ καταλαεῖτε ἀλλήλων
4:13-17	οἱ λέγοντες	Ἄγε νῦν
5:1-6	οἱ πλούσιοι	Ἄγε νῦν . . . κλαύσατε
5:7-11	ἀδελφοί	Μακροθυμήσατε plus 4 imperatives
5:12-18	ἀδελφοί μου	μὴ ὀμνύετε
5:19-20	ἀδελφοί μου	γινωσκέτω

In this analysis, there are fourteen sections of the discourse in addition to the epistolary prescript. Each of these contributes its own unique semantic development of the main theme – namely, demonstrating behavior that accords with divine wisdom. A few comments are necessary about occasional departures from the otherwise uniform language features in each section. Three of the

sections begin with a rhetorical question rather than with an imperative (2:14-26; 3:13-18; 4:1-10). The first passage (2:14-26) could be viewed as a consequential application of the section beginning in 2:1, particularly continuing the theme of partiality as applied to the poor. I discuss these and many other details about the application of peak in James in my discourse commentary on the book.²⁸

Section 4:1-10 begins with a question and immediately follows the *thematic* peak of the discourse (3:13-18). Commentators have noted that there are many verbal similarities in these passages and often take them as two sections of the same unit.²⁹ I suggest that 4:1-10 is a sub-unit of 3:13-4:10 and should also be considered the *hortatory* peak of the discourse. This is evidenced in the “zone of turbulence” created by the concentration of ten imperatives in 4:7-10.

This explanation of the linearization of James pays attention to the special way that he indicates foreground prominence by the use of peak. It also notes the ways that he uses the grammatical resources of his language to group his discourse to most effectively communicate the details of the theme embodied in his peak. With this approach, his readers can better develop a mental representation of the discourse at all levels. Finally, if his readers heed his exhortations, they will then become “whole” persons in their undivided loyalty to God.

Based on the above top down analysis, I suggest the following outline (i.e., macrostructure) of the letter, stressing its hortatory character. Bold points indicate their prominent roles as the thematic and hortatory peaks of the discourse.

Prescript	1:1
1. Be Joyful in Trials	1:2-15
2. Do Not Be Deceived about God's Goodness	1:16-18
3. Become a Good Hearer/Doer of the Word	1:19-27
4. Do Not Show Favoritism	2:1-13
5. Show Your Faith by Your Works	2:14-26
6. Be Consistent in Your Speech	3:1-12
7. Follow the Wisdom of God	3:13-18
8. Become a Friend of God	4:1-10
9. Do Not Speak Against One Another	4:11-12
10. Do Not Plan Presumptuously	4:13-17
11. You Rich Should Treat the Poor Justly	5:1-6
12. Wait Patiently for the Lord's Coming	5:7-11

²⁸ William Varner, *James: A New Perspective* (Houston, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2011).

²⁹ Johnson, *James*, 267-69.

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|--------------------------------|---------|
| 13. Do Not Swear but Pray | 5:12-18 |
| 14. Convert the Erring Brother | 5:19-20 |

With this type of analysis, the expositor can approach this book with a successful effort to “think James’ thoughts after him.” One of the great joys and challenges of expository preaching is that we do not impose our own pre-conceived structure on a text, but we attempt to draw out our structure and outline of the sermon from the features of the text itself. The type of analysis that we have applied to James is the necessary step to take so we can move from exegesis to exposition – with the accompanying blessings that attend such an effort!

