

# Equip: Resources on the Book of James

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The clickbait on James is often Martin Luther's supposed distaste for James. Many commentaries and articles start with this headline, but they fail to tell the rest of the story.

Craig Blomberg tempered the interpretation of Luther and James after mentioning the oft-told report of Luther's hesitation, but the tempering is stuck in the second footnote.

James tossed ice on the preaching enterprise three chapters into a five-chapter book. Not many of you should be teachers, you know. Dare the pastor continue? If you said 'yes,' read on.

Will Willimon wrote the introduction for Walter Brueggeman's book *The Word Militant*. Willimon was about to "throw in the towel and quit" while pastoring an inner-city church in South Carolina. This despair coincided with a reading of Brueggeman's commentary on Jeremiah. Willimon chose to continue as a pastor.

While most commentary reading has not changed the course of ministry to such a degree, it can provide a lift to preaching. The lift needs to be more like an aged person's rise from a chair, rather than a rocket headed for space. Slow down.

One of the many insights gained from watching Joel Gregory study a passage was his pace in reading commentaries. Gregory read the commentary deliberately and slowly. Prior to this experience, I read commentaries hurriedly to find something useful.

Whichever commentary you use, slow down your pace.

## ***The Zondervan Exegetical Commentary*** **by Craig Blomberg and Mariam Kamell**

*The Zondervan Exegetical Commentary* is a 21st-century commentary. Blomberg and Kamell wrote the commentary as a professor/research assistant team at Denver Theological Seminary. Each volume in the series was organized around seven components. I gravitate toward the main idea and theology in application components.

According to Haddon Robinson and many others, the sermon should have a main idea. Clinton Arnold and Zondervan's editorial board believed commentaries should also. The main idea component confirmed or challenged my main idea for the passage. The main idea in the commentary often was several ideas, not one, but the detailed section offered a clear direction for reading.

The theology in application component is equal to the exegesis component. In it, Blomberg and Kamell move beyond James to the remaining New Testament and occasionally to the Old Testament.

The connection with Peter and Paul is especially prevalent. The authors float the notion James was early source material for Peter and Paul.

## ***Studies in the Epistle of James*** by A.T. **Robinson**

Archibald Thomas Robertson was a highly regarded scholar of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who taught at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for decades. Many preachers have Robertson's *Word Pictures of*

*the New Testament* on their shelves.

Robertson placed steady emphasis on the Greek language's value for understanding and preaching the text. Robertson had the ability to present language and textual matters in such a way that it doesn't prevent his accessibility to youth and congregational Bible studies.

The first two chapters provide a summary. If trying to ascertain fact or historical record, Robertson's introductory chapter can leave the student without much to stand on. Many of the sentences contain notions of speculation, as evidenced by regular use of the words "may," "possibly" and "probably."

However, Robertson offers a few definite statements about James. For instance, Robertson confidently stated his view of authorship and the relationship James had with Peter and Paul, even describing Paul and James as friends.

The preacher in need of a sermon should not look to Robertson for technical matters, though Robertson is able to cover technical questions when needed. An example of this is when Robertson gave context for a difficult-to-translate passage in James 3.

Robertson's material in Chapters 3-12 is the equivalent of application in a sermon. If a preacher is looking to test the validity of an application point from the passage, Robertson's book on James will make a solid contribution.

## ***January Bible Study* by Joel C. Gregory**

The *January Bible Study*, published by the Southern Baptist Convention's press in 1986, is not a comprehensive commentary, and attention is not widespread, but do not let it go unnoticed in your study of James.

While I have seen such series over the years, few made it to my commentary stack, and few are found in academic libraries. Gregory's study is an exception.

Gregory was named by Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary as one of the 12 most effective preachers in the English-speaking world. He remains very connected to Baptist preaching, recently delivering a keynote sermon at the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting.

The Life Lessons section of the *January Bible Study* is an excellent source for potential main ideas for preaching the sermon.

Reading the study will leave a preacher stunned and asking, "Where does Dr. Gregory find a story about Tuffy the tamed porpoise?" Stories like this are rarely found in commentaries. While one can use Gregory's illustrations, the better option is to spark the preacher's creativity by reading of Tuffy's water adventures.

## Parting thoughts

Other James' commentaries on my shelf include the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* by R.T. France and George Guthrie, and the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* by Douglas Moo. Moo's other commentaries on James seem to garner more attention.

Pastors need a boost when preaching. This especially is true when preaching James' material. Pastors need the boost commentaries can provide.

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*CORRECTION: The dates of A.T. Robertson's time at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary were corrected.*