

# THE CONCEPT OF FAITH IN THE LETTER OF JAMES IN LIGHT OF THE WISDOM TRADITION

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**Abstrak:** Banyak ahli telah memperlihatkan bahwa tradisi hikmat memiliki pengaruh yang kuat terhadap surat Yakobus, khususnya dalam hal gaya sastra dan berbagai istilah yang digunakan dalamnya. Namun, pengaruh dari tradisi hikmat dalam surat Yakobus lebih dari hal-hal tersebut. Dengan menggunakan konsep iman sebagai sudut pandang penelitian, artikel ini menemukan hal yang sama di antara keduanya dan membuktikan bahwa keduanya tidak hanya berbagi dalam menggunakan teknik sastra namun juga berbagi dalam pendekatan dan pemahaman teologis. Mirip dengan tradisi hikmat, surat Yakobus mendekati iman dari perspektif hidup sehari-hari, yakni dari masalah penderitaan, dan memahami masalah ini dari perspektif Allah. Surat Yakobus menekankan bahwa orang percaya yang sejati seharusnya percaya dengan keadilan Allah dan seharusnya hidup sesuai dengan iman yang benar yang dia percaya.

**Kata-kata kunci:** *Tradisi hikmat, surat Yakobus, penderitaan, iman, takut akan Tuhan, realitas, hikmat.*

## Introduction

Tenzin Gyatso<sup>1</sup>, the 14th Dalai Lama, says: "I am struck by the similarities between this beautiful letter [the letter of James] in

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1. Tenzin Gyatso, "Introduction" In *The Epistle of James, Peter, John, and Jude* (2000) Accessed April 13, 2014.

the Bible and some of texts in my own Buddhist tradition." He also shows his interest in the concept of faith taught in the letter of James and says: "The real test of spiritual practice lies in practitioner's behavior. There is some times a tendency to think of the spiritual life as primarily introspective, divorced from the concerns of everyday life and society. This, I believe, is plainly wrong and also rejected in this epistle... We find a similar principle in Buddhist texts as well."

Kierkegaard, the great 19th century religious thinker, was also attracted to letter of James,<sup>2</sup> the concept of faith in the letter in particular drawing his attention. He believed that the concept of faith in letter of James is important, and Christians should understand it correctly. He also emphasized that the concept of "justification by faith alone" may lead Christians' "avoiding works" and "divorcing faith from practice".<sup>3</sup> Therefore, he preferred to use the phrase "justification by grace alone" rather than "justification by faith alone" so that people could learn not to separate works (morality) from faith.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, while these celebrated thinkers are attracted to letter of James, for many years many Christian theologians have not given much attention to it.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the concept of faith in letter of James also has gone unnoticed. Therefore, this study begins

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2. R. Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1-10.

3. See Bauckham, *James*, 162-165.

4. See Bauckham, *James*, 162-165.

5. Cf. Luke T. Johnson, *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God: Studies in the Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 235-242.

with the question: why is letter of James important? And if it is important, then: how should it be read? The answers to these questions will help us understand the essential role of the wisdom tradition in understanding letter of James and the concept of faith in it.

### **The Letter of James<sup>6</sup> and Its Significance**

Letter of James is important for several reasons. Three of them will be discussed here. First, letter of James could be the best source of information about James the brother of Jesus<sup>7</sup> and the early

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6. The term "author" used to mention the author of letter of James (LOJ) in this writing does not imply rejection of James's authorship. The term is used to avoid oversimplification because the debates on the authorship of LOJ and the issue of "pseudepigraphy" in the Catholic Epistles seem far from over (see Frey, Jörg, Jens Herzer, Martina Janßen, and Clare K. Rothschild, eds. 2009. *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen*. WUNT 246. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). Although both issues are important, a discussion of these may prove to tangential (for further discussion of these issues, see Van Houwelingen. "The Authenticity of 2 Peter: Problems and Possible Solutions" *EJT* 19.2. 2010: 119-129; Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 89-121; Bauckham. *James*, 11-25; McKnight. *The Letter*, 13-38).

7. Scholars' interest in the "historical James" has grown rapidly. Unfortunately, LOJ does not seem to have drawn much attention alongside this. For example, Eisenman (1986 and 1997) argues that James was the "righteous teacher," the ideal leader in the Qumran community, who defends Jewish heritage and attacks the High Priest Ananus and Paul because of their relation to the Gentiles (for critical response to Eisenman's proposal, see Philip R. Davies, "James in the Qumran Scrolls" In *James the Just and Christian Origins*, ed. Bruce Chilton & C. A. Evans, 17-31. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 17-31. While Eisenman's book (1997) on James is almost 1000 pages, LOJ apparently does not get his attention.

church.<sup>8</sup> A few New Testament passages (Acts 15, Galatians 2.9, Jas 1.1) show that James had a key role in the early church, and his teachings probably had great influence among the believers. In fact, James' primary role and influence in the early church may have given off the impression that his teachings represented the "mainstream" thought of the early church. Therefore, the concept of faith in letter of James could be viewed as the paramount and prominent feature of the early church.<sup>9</sup>

Second, letter of James plays a pivotal part in the Catholic Epistles. From the canonical perspective,<sup>10</sup> letter of James was

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8. James and his teachings can be found in Acts, the letters of Paul (e.g., the Galatians), and LOJ. Bruce Chilton, "Conclusions and Questions" In *James the Just & Christian Origins*, ed. B. Chilton & C. A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1999): 251-267, uses Acts (15.19-21; 21.17-26) as the main source for reconstructing the "historical James," showing that James was concerned with Jewish ritual law (such as circumcision and kashrut). However, this reconstruction is not evidentially supported by LOJ (see the helpful discussion on this issue in McKnight. *A Light*, 83-130. For a more balanced reconstruction of the "historical James," see Johnson, *Brother of Jesus*, 1-23, and Bauckham. *James*, 112-157.

9. The New Perspective (see Dunn 2005) argues that Paul's teachings of justification should be understood in light of early Jewish teachings. Nevertheless, since Paul was a part of the early church, it is reasonable to understand Paul both in light of the early church and early Judaism. What's more, since James and his letter could represent a theology held by the early church, it is also possible to read Paul's teachings of faith together with James' teachings of faith. To add to this, it is also still possible to read both perspectives in light of early Jewish thought.

10. Robert W. Wall, *Community of the Wise: the Letter of James*. The New Testament in Context, ed. Howard C. Kee & J. Andrew Overman. (Valley Forge: Trinity International, 1997): 276. Explains that the canonical approach is based on the conviction that "the Christian bible is both a canonical collection of writings and a collection of canonical writings" (See also David R. Nienhuis, *Not by Paul Alone: The Formation of the Catholic*

probably intentionally located at the first place in the Catholic Epistles.<sup>11</sup> Wall argues that letter of James is fundamental in helping Christians read the Catholic Epistles because it functions as a type of “a grammar” of sorts within them.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the recurring theme of faith in letter of James,<sup>13</sup> could link the letters in the Catholic Epistles.<sup>14</sup> In addition, in light of the canonical perspective, the fact that the concept of faith drew much attention in letter of James

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*Epistle Collection and the Christian Canon* (Waco: Baylor University, 2007), 1-28.

11. Western church fathers/manuscripts (such as Augustine) placed the letter of Peter in the first position. In contrast, the sequential order James-Peter-John-Jude was preserved mainly in the Eastern canons (such as in Eusebius and codex Vaticanus); in fact Nienhuis, *Not by Paul Alone*, 86, argues that this sequence “was standardized in the East from a very early period.” For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Nienhuis, *Not by Paul Alone*, 29-97.

12. Robert W. Wall, “A Unifying Theology of the Catholic Epistles: A Canonical Approach” In *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition*, ed. J. Schlosser. (Leuven: Leuven University, 2004), 43-71. Believes that in the context of canon formation, the arrangement of the Catholic Epistles after the letters of Paul indicates its function as an antidote to those who misread Paul’s letter. However, his proposal is debatable. His argumentation is apparently based on the assumption that the canonical process is polemical in essence, but this is an overemphasis because the canonical collection was also used in many contexts, especially pedagogically (cf. Lee Martin McDonald, “Canon of the New Testament” In *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible Vol 1: A-C*, ed. K. D. Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006): 542-543. The position of the Catholic Epistles and Pauline letters in the canon is based on the assumption that their teachings complete each other.

13. Cf. Dan G. McCartney, *James*. BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009). Patrick J. Hartin. *James*. Sacra Pagina Series 14, ed. Daniel J. Harrington. (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2003), 30-31.

14. Cf. J. Schlosser, “Le corpus des Épîtres catholiques.” In *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition*, ed. J. Schlosser. (Leuven: Leuven University, 2004), 3-41.

indicates that this concept is fundamental in the corpus of the Catholic Epistles. Those who read the Catholic Epistles presumably are expected to understand this concept before they could learn other letters in this corpus.

Third, letter of James shows the influence of the wisdom tradition in New Testament theology.<sup>15</sup> The wisdom tradition has piqued the interest of Old Testament scholarship as of late,<sup>16</sup> and some scholars<sup>17</sup> have shown that it had major influence not only in the Old Testament period, but also in the Hellenistic period, in which

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15. Numerous scholars (see, e.g., Barton [1999], Witherington III [1994]) have recognized the influence of the wisdom tradition in NT writings. The tradition influences Jesus' teaching (e.g., Mt 5-7), Johannine writings (e.g., John 1.1-3), and Paul (e.g., Col 1.15-20). Unfortunately, only a few scholars pay attention to the wisdom tradition in LOJ; it is Mayor (1954) and Bauckham (1999) who gives a major contribution to attract scholars to this issue.

16. Old Testament (OT) scholars identify wisdom as a tradition, genre, and literature. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 335, argues that the wisdom tradition is another perspective in OT that is different from the main traditions (the tradition of salvation history). Some scholars (such as Perdue. *The Sword*, 80-84, argue that wisdom could be seen as a genre. Wisdom could also be seen as a book collection (Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth, Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon) called "wisdom literature," written by so-called wise men (compare Whybray 1974).

17. Such as John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*. The Old Testament Library, ed. J. L. Mays, C. A. Newsom, and D. L. Petersen (Louisville: Westminster. 1997). Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008)

the early church was born.<sup>18</sup> Bartholomew & O'Dowd<sup>19</sup> agree with Van Leeuwen and believe that the wisdom is about "how all such activities [such as: saying, working, etc.] find their meaning in the whole of God's created order."<sup>20</sup> suggests that a theological approach will contribute to the study of James since it will appreciate and understand James from his own theological perspective, the best lens through which one could view the concept of faith;<sup>21</sup> and the theological approach used in letter of James will show the influence of the wisdom tradition in the letter. This makes James's voice unique in New Testament theology.

Approaches and theological perspectives used in letter of James make the letter unique. Letter of James and the wisdom tradition share similar characteristics in which they attempt to

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18. Discussions on the wisdom tradition in the Hellenistic periods can be found in William Horbury, "The Christian Use and the Jewish Origins of the Wisdom of Solomon" In *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, ed John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 182-196, and Bartholomew & O'Dowd, *Old Testament*, 231-238.

19. Craig G. Bartholomew & Ryan P. O'Dowd. *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction* (Downers Grove: IVP. 2011), 24.

20. Johnson, *Brother of Jesus*, 235-245.

21. Johnson, *Brother of Jesus*, 236-242, finds that the "historical-critical paradigm" has led many scholars to minimize the essential role of James in NT theology. This is probably happened because the historical-critical approach has led many scholars to believe that LOJ was not written in the first century AD; as a result, they do not see any reason why LOJ should be used as a main source in NT theology. In contrast, the theological approach may lead scholars to find that James' theology is in parallel with first century church' traditions.

understand realities from God's perspective.<sup>22</sup> Clements shows that the wisdom tradition was growing in accordance with historical situations transpiring in Israel, and the tradition reaches its final form in the post-exilic periods when Israel faced the reality that they were scattered in a diaspora.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, he also argues that in these periods, the wisdom tradition reached "its most meaningful and lasting contribution to Israel's intellectual life." In this context, the wisdom tradition is basically a theological reflection built from the reality and perspective of diaspora. Interestingly, letter of James also was also written to Jewish believers who lived in diaspora; in James 1.1, the author of letter of James says "...taij dwdeka fulaij taij en th/ diaspora/." As Jewish people who live in diaspora, the hearers of letter of James were familiar with the wisdom tradition, and therefore, it is reasonable to believe that James would use the approach and the theological perspective from the tradition (i.e., the wisdom tradition) that was familiar to his hearers in his letter. In addition, similar to the wisdom tradition, letter of James talks about

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22. Apart from the similarity of the approach and the perspective used, there is also similarity of literary styles/forms (such as the literary form "wisdom of admonition" used in Jas 1.19b-20 and Prv 3.6) between the wisdom tradition and LOJ (see Bauckham, *James*, 35-56). In addition, there are also some allusions in LOJ (for example, allusion to the story of Job in Jas 5.11) that connect the letter to the wisdom tradition (cf. McCartney, *James*, 44-48); this demonstrates that James also used the wisdom tradition in his letter.

23. Ronald E. Clements, *Wisdom in Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 24-25.



some real life issues such as believers' sufferings (cf. Jas 1),<sup>24</sup> poverty (Jas 2),<sup>25</sup> speaking (Jas 3),<sup>26</sup> wealth (Jas 4-5), and more. The teachings of God that are prominent in letter of James indicate how important the perspective of God is in this letter;<sup>27</sup> and this feature shows the

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24. The issue of suffering is prominent in the wisdom tradition, especially in the book of Job. The author of Job did not give any answers to the issue of suffering faced by God's people; in contrast, through the lens of God's perspective (Job 38-40), the author encourages his audience to accept that God is beyond human understanding and to put their faith in him (for more detailed discussion on this issue, see James L. Crenshaw, *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writings on Old Testament Wisdom* (Macon: Mercer University, 1995), 455-467.

25. The issue of poverty and wealth in the wisdom tradition could be found in the book of Proverbs. In this book, the author (or authors) shows that, while wealth is seen as a reward for hard work (see, e.g., Prv 10.4), the rich need to help the poor (e.g., Prv 22.9), which consist of protecting the widows (e.g., Prv 23.10), and those who despise the poor insults God (e.g., Prv. 14.31). Compare Crenshaw, *Urgent Advice*, 396-404; see also Whybray (1990) and Van Leeuwen, *Wealth*, 1992.

26. The theme of speaking is prominent in the book of Proverbs (e.g., Prv 13.3; 18.7). This theme is emphatically used to differentiate between the wise person and the fool. (see K. T. Aitken, "Proverbs: Sayings and Theme" In *NIDOTTE Vol 4*, ed. W. A. VanGemeren (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 1095-1096. At the same time, the book of Proverbs also emphasizes the danger of speaking of the lady folly (cf. Prv 9.13-18); this adulterous lady is described as being so dangerous that young men could be easily entrapped by her. In OT theology (for example, in the book of Hosea), the metaphor of adultery was used to indicate Israel's unfaithfulness to God.

27. Johnson, *Brother of Jesus*, 245-248, believes that the teachings of God in LOJ become the unique character of the letter. The teaching of God in this letter is shown in rich descriptions and metaphors (such as *kur iou sabawq* "the Lord of Hosts" [5.4] and *tou/patroj twh fwtwn* "father of lights" [1.17]). And the most distinctive designation of God in LOJ is the image of God as the giver (the source) of the gifts and goodness (cf. 1.17). For an extensive study on this subject, see Wenger (2011).

similarity between letter of James and the wisdom tradition which also attempts to understand reality from God's perspective.

The unique character of James's theology is probably not only caused by the influence of the wisdom tradition as a whole, but also because of the influence of the wisdom of Jesus. Bauckham believes that James understood the wisdom tradition in light of the wisdom of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> The similarities between James and Jesus's teachings, according to Bauckham, are evidences showing that letter of James was indebted to the wisdom of Jesus.<sup>29</sup> Although Bauckham's argumentation is reasonable, it is difficult to identify Jesus' tradition used together in letter of James and other traditions (such as in Matthew or Luke or others).<sup>30</sup> It is also important to notice that while the similarities between letter of James and Jesus's

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28. Bauckham, *James*, 108.

29. Bauckham, *James*, 95. Bauckham argues that there are some differences between Jesus' wisdom and the wisdom tradition. However, the wisdom tradition could adjust in accord with a situation and condition faced, and therefore, it is understandable that Jesus' wisdom and the wisdom tradition (such as the book of Proverbs) is different in many aspects. In addition, the main character of the wisdom tradition does not adopt the vocabulary used or topics discussed (such as equality in society, the law, etc.) or the literary forms used (instruction, diatribe, etc.), but it is still similar with respects to its approach and its theological perspective.

30. Scholars disagree when it comes to identifying which Jesus tradition is used in LOJ. For example, Bauckham, *James*, 107, believes that the traditions used by LOJ is from the synoptic tradition (such as Matthew and Luke). In contrast, Hartin (2005) who also analyzes Jesus' tradition in LOJ argues that the traditions used by LOJ are from Q. The problem is that although it is possible to compare LOJ and other aspects of Jesus' tradition and although it is possible to use redaction criticism and to reconstruct how and why James use Jesus's tradition, the result is subjective.

tradition should not be seen exaggeratedly, the differences between letter of James and Jesus's tradition also should not be oversimplified.

### **The Letter of James and Influences of the Wisdom Tradition**

We have argued that letter of James is related to the wisdom tradition. Bartholomew and O'Dowd discuss how New Testament authors used the wisdom tradition and conclude that New Testament authors mostly used the idea of wisdom to show Jesus as "divine wisdom"; despite this, exception should be given to letter of James because it reads like the wisdom tradition (i.e., wisdom literature); they say: "To us [Bartholomew and O'Dowd], James's epistle is most intriguing for the way it brings us back to the Old Testament themes of wisdom, torah and living well in God's created order<sup>31</sup>."

Other scholars have come to the same conclusion that letter of James is connected to the wisdom tradition. Although Allison Jr., finds some differences between letter of James and the wisdom tradition, he identifies that they are closely related.<sup>32</sup> McKnight believes that the wisdom tradition influences James' ethical teachings and its literary genre.<sup>33</sup> McCartney finds that letter of James shared traditions with wisdom literature.<sup>34</sup> Cheung argues that

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31. Bartholomew & O'Dowd, *Old Testament*, 238-259.

32. Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James*. ICC (New York: T&T Clark, 2013), 53-54.

33. Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*. NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 47-49.

34. McCartney, *James*, 44-49.

the wisdom instruction is the genre of letter of James.<sup>35</sup> Bauckham addresses that letter of James is the wisdom *paraenesis* sharing literary styles and forms with the wisdom tradition.<sup>36</sup>

Although scholars agree that the wisdom tradition had significant influence in letter of James, they focus their studies primarily on finding similar themes and literary forms shared by letter of James and the wisdom tradition, and they find difficulties while trying to relate both. Those who observe similar themes between the wisdom tradition and letter of James<sup>37</sup> will have difficulty in explaining some missing prominent ideas of the wisdom tradition in letter of James, such as "the lady wisdom and lady folly."<sup>38</sup> Similarly, those who analyze literary forms in wisdom literature and letter of James will also have difficulty finding a literary form used consistently in the wisdom tradition.<sup>39</sup> On the contrary, they will find that letter

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35. Luke L. Cheung, *The Genre, Composition and Hermeneutics of the Epistle of James*. Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), 5-52.

36. Bauckham, *James*, 29-60.

37. See Bauckham, *James*, 95

38. There are some key words that are common in wisdom literature such as *yir'at yhwah* "fear of the lord," *Derek* "way," *hëokmâ* "wisdom," *lâmad* "listen," *dâbar* "speak," *yâda* "understand/know," and so on (cf. Perdue, *The Sword*, 83). Bauckham, *James*, 95-96, shows that some issues of family relationships, rulers, and government are missing in LOJ. However, it is important to notice that even in wisdom literature, there is no certain issue that is so prominent that it is discussed in every book in wisdom literature.

39. Crenshaw, *Urgent Advice*, 48-76. Identifies eight literary forms used in wisdom literature, i.e., proverb (prominent in the book of Proverbs), riddle (used in Proverbs), fable and allegory (used in Qoheleth), hymn and prayer (used in Sirach, Job, Proverbs and Wisdom), dialogue (used in mainly

of James and the wisdom tradition basically share the poetic styles and forms. To understand the relation between letter of James and the wisdom tradition, therefore, other angles need to be explored. This study argues that the angle that is able to link letter of James and the wisdom tradition is the theological approach used by them (i.e., they similarly build a theology from reality) and the perspectives used to understand realities faced by God's people (i.e., they similarly use God's perspective to understand realities such as a suffering).

To understand the relationship between the wisdom tradition and letter of James, it will be helpful to discuss the question: how should the wisdom tradition<sup>40</sup> be understood?<sup>41</sup> Bartholomew

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in Job), confession (used in Qoheleth, Sirach and Wisdom), lists (used in Job, Sirach, and Wisdom), and didactic poetry (used in Job) and narrative (used in Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon).

40. Christian traditions in the medieval period understood and approached the wisdom tradition symbolically and spiritually, and in the early modern period, not many Christian scholars gave attention to the wisdom tradition because scholars were more interested in the historical studies, and they found that the wisdom tradition did not speak much about it. Von Rad returned scholars' interest to the study of the wisdom tradition. See further Bartholomew & O'Dowd, *Old Testament*, 20-24.

41. The link between the wisdom tradition and non-Israelite wisdom traditions (such as Egyptian wisdom and Mesopotamian wisdom) is complex (cf. James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (London: SCM, 1981). Davids, P. H. 1982. *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster). While the wisdom tradition and non-Israelite traditions both primarily speak about real life issues, the fundamental difference between the wisdom tradition and the others, according to Bartholomew & O'Dowd, *Old Testament*, 26-27, 32-46, is that the wisdom tradition perceives human life and experiences through monotheistic lens, especially from the perspective of God.

and O'Dowd<sup>42</sup> believe that wisdom is "about the paths that lead to life, shalom (peace) and flourishing." They also agree with Van Leeuwen who argues that there are four features of the wisdom tradition i.e., (i) "wisdom presupposes the 'fear of Yahweh/God'," (ii) "wisdom entails insight into and practice of the *generic* patterns and norms for creation and creatures," (iii) "wisdom entails knowledge of and appropriate action with reference to *particular* [italics his] circumstances, institutions, persons and other creatures," (iv) "wisdom is traditional. Knowledge of generic patterns and their recognition in particular situations is mediated generationally, whether in a profession or the general affairs of life."<sup>43</sup> Bartholomew and O'Dowd<sup>44</sup> also state that biblical wisdom has three qualities, namely it is found in its relation to God; it is also found in the community of God; and it is not always readily understood. In short, there are three basic elements in the wisdom tradition, namely, (i)

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42. Bartholomew & O'Dowd, *Old Testament*, 19-20.

43. R. Van Leeuwen, "Wisdom Literature." In *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. K. J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 848-849.

44. Bartholomew & O'Dowd, *Old Testament*, 19-20.

the fear of the Lord, (ii) understanding, and (iii) reality;<sup>45</sup> the wisdom tradition tries to *understand reality*<sup>46</sup> based on the *fear of the Lord*.

What is the meaning of “fear of the Lord” in the wisdom tradition?<sup>47</sup> Longman III observes the fear of the Lord in wisdom literature and Psalms and defines it as “a virtue that leads to piety, praise and humility, since one who fears God recognizes that God,

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45. Perdue, *The Sword*, 1-4, 412-419, argues that the wisdom tradition was written in the influence of its “larger social history of the culture in which it took root and flourished” and that the wisdom tradition does not comprise “disconnected ideas that is seen as eternal thoughts the savants understood to be true.” Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “Wisdom and Holiness at Qumran: Strategies for Dealing with Sin in the Community Rule.” In *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?: Wisdom in the Bible, the Church and the Contemporary World*, ed. Stephen C. Barton, 47-60. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 199), 47-60, observes the wisdom tradition in the community of Qumran and concludes that the wisdom tradition in this literature is not a kind of “non-occasional wisdom.”

46. Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Literature*. The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 112-116, shows that the understanding of reality is an important element in the wisdom tradition; reality was not seen in an unhistorical manner. At the same time, the wisdom tradition believed that the “relationship between humans and their environment” is dynamic. Since men were not created as independent from the rest of creation, they need to live in harmony with their neighbors, nature, and God. Human realities (such as sufferings and poverty) in the wisdom tradition will be evaluated from this perspective (creation theology).

47. The concept of “fear of the Lord” in the book of Proverbs can be found in Proverbs 1.7 and 31.30; it begins and ends Proverbs (see Longman III, *Fear of the Lord*, 202). This phrase is not prominent in Job (used in Job 1), but the concept is important because it functions as the theological perspective of the book (p. 204). “Fear of the Lord” in Qoheleth was used as the conclusion of his book (Qoh 12.13-14). In Sirach, “fear of the Lord” is a significant theme (see, e.g., Sir 1.13-16 and 33.1-3). The Wisdom of Solomon does not use the phrase.

not oneself, is the center of the cosmos."<sup>48</sup> Thus, the fear of the Lord entails the inseparable element of fear and respect; this virtue actually makes people worship God even when they face unsolved questions in their life, such as suffering.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Bartholomew & O'Dowd<sup>50</sup> are correct to define the fear of the Lord as "total devotion to God..."<sup>51</sup> Sirach 33.1-3 confirms this conclusion; it is said that those who fear the Lord are totally committed to God and trust in God's law.

No evil will befall the man who fears the Lord, but in trial he will deliver him again and again.

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48. T. Longman III, "Fear of the Lord," In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed. T. Longman III & Peter Enns, 201-205. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 205.

49. The theme of God's retribution in wisdom literature is prominent. In fact, the theme could be viewed as a link that connects wisdom literature. A prominent question in wisdom literature is: why do the righteous suffer? Wisdom literature did not try to solve the problem but teaches the audience to accept that the suffering is a mystery and that God's people have to trust in God when they face it (see Van Leeuwen. "Wealth and Poverty: System and Contradiction in Proverb," *Hebrew Studies* 33: 1992, 25-36; J. H. Walton, "Retribution," In *Dictionary of Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings*, ed. T. Longman III & P. Enns (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 651-653.

50. Bartholomew & O'Dowd, *Old Testament*, 25.

51. Murphy (1990) discusses the meaning "fear of the Lord" in the book of Proverbs and concludes that this phrase is used to indicate "a commitment to God" as the basis of "the wisdom enterprise." In other words, searching wisdom in the book of Proverbs is not only related to searching knowledge but searching God's will in human life. The theology of creation rooted in the wisdom tradition also indicates that the wisdom tradition teaches its audiences to trust in God, to obey God's will and to live in accord with God's order/design.



A wise man will not hate the law, but he who is hypocritical about it is like a boat in a storm. A man of understanding will trust in the law; for him the law is as dependable as an inquiry by means of Urim. (Sir 33:1-3 RSV)

Sirach identifies the individual who fears the Lord as a wise man and a man of understanding. This man will live in obedience to God's law because he trusts in God who gives his law to his people.

In the first century of early Christianity, surprisingly, the phrase "fear of the Lord" is applied to Gentiles who join in Jewish community and religion but were not circumcised.<sup>52</sup> This can be seen in Acts 13.26 (: Andrej adel foi( ui)oi. genouj VAbraam kai. oi' en umih foboumenoi ton qeon( hmi)h o' l)ogoj thj swthriaj tauthj exapesta)h). The term is used not only to refer to the Gentiles who joined in the Jewish community and had a respectful attitude to God, but it is also used in reference to the Gentiles in that community who actually believed (i.e., had faith) in God.<sup>53</sup> In other words, the application and use of the phrase "fear of the Lord" in the first century apparently had changed by that time period.

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52. For a full study of this topic, see Scot McKnight, *A Light among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991).

53. Compare Stanley E. Porter. "Fear." In *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 498. Harold C. Washington. "Fear," In *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Vol. 2*, ed. K. D. Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 442.

Although letter of James does not use the phrase “fear of the Lord” because its application and use had changed,<sup>54</sup> the concept of “fear of the Lord” in the wisdom tradition is still important in this letter. There is an overlapping meaning between the concept of faith in letter of James and the fear of the Lord in the wisdom tradition.<sup>55</sup> According to Louw and Nida,<sup>56</sup> the concept of faith in the New Testament writings is used in two semantic fields, i.e., the semantic field “Trust and Rely” and the semantic field “be Believers or Christian Faith.” In the context of semantic field “Trust and Rely,” the concept of faith could be understood as the act of believing in something/someone, such as believing/trusting in God. In letter of James the concept of faith is related to three elements, namely, a belief, trust, and obedience; true faith, according to letter of James,

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54. The concept of “fear of the Lord” also does not appear in the Wisdom of Solomon. Instead, the Wisdom of Solomon emphasizes the importance of “trusting in God.” For example, in the Wisdom of Solomon 3.9 (“Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his elect, and he watches over his holy ones--RSV”), the author reiterates how trusting in God is the key to understanding the truth. Therefore, while the Proverbs accentuates “fear of the Lord” as the beginning of true knowledge, the Wisdom of Solomon uses a different phrase (trust in God) to speak about the same concept.

55. The overlapping meaning between the concept “fear of the Lord” and “trust in God” can be found in Sirach 2.8 “You who fear the Lord, trust in him, and your reward will not fail--RSV” (See also Sir 33.1-3). While in the Wisdom of Solomon, the author was apparently unwilling to use the phrase “the fear to the Lord,” in the book of Sirach, the phrase “fear to the Lord” and “trust in God” are interconnected and probably interchangeable.

56. J. P. Louw, and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. 2 Vols. 2nd ed. (New York: UBS, 1989), 2:289; 1:376-379.

is seen as a belief that empowers and makes an individual to trust in God and live in conformity to God's will (God's law). In contrast, a faith that is only a confession (without any trust and obedience to God) is not genuine faith. Trust and obedience that becomes the character of true faith in letter of James is also seen as the character of those who fear the Lord, one who is like the wise man (a wise man) in the wisdom tradition (cf. Sirach 33.1-3). Therefore, if a generic character of the wisdom tradition is laid on the concept of "fear of the Lord," underlining the wisdom principle in wisdom literature, letter of James could be seen as a kind of wisdom tradition/literature because the essential elements of the concept of "fear of the Lord" (trusting in God and obeying God's law) also exist in letter of James and recur significantly throughout the letter (see, e.g., 1.2-3, 22-23; 2.14-26; 3.13-18; 4.13-17; 5.7-12).

Letter of James also shares another characteristic with the wisdom tradition, that is, the understanding of reality. Letter of James and the wisdom tradition had similar concerns and approaches in which both emphasize the importance of having the correct understanding, the ability to see existence from God's purview, especially when it comes to facing the realities of suffering, poverty, evil speech in community, wealth, and more. Issues discussed in letter of James are probably hypothetical; however, it does not mean that these issues are improbable. Similar to wisdom literature that was written to respond to the aforementioned realities, the issues

put forth in letter of James could represent real life situations in the believing community.

For example, the author of letter of James discusses the issue of speaking without restraint in James 3.1-12; he discusses this issue not only because it is a universal human problem, but mostly because it became a real concern in the believing community. The issue was probably related to a teacher in the community who failed to control his tongue (see Jas 3.1-2). Compared to James 2.14-26, it is also possible that the teacher's life reeked of hypocrisy, the consistency of his speech in discord with the inconsistency of his faithful actions (see Jas 3.9). Since his tongue, along with that of fellow believers, could not be trusted, his speaking became dangerous and deleterious to the life of the community.<sup>57</sup>

How did James deal with this issue? It is interesting that the author of letter of James did not see this issue through the lens of deed-consequence (retributive) perspective, which is noticeable in general (non-Israelite) wisdom traditions. In contrast, he used the creation theology, which is prevalent in the wisdom tradition,<sup>58</sup> as a

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57. Compare Luke T. Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 37A (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 262-263. McCartney, *James*, 192-193. McKnight, *The Letter*, 296-297.

58. In OT scholarship, there are two major traditions in OT theology, namely, salvation history and creation. While the traditions of salvation history mainly were preserved in the prophetic traditions, the traditions of creation were preserved in the wisdom tradition. The tradition of creation holds that everything should be placed in accord with God's order; hence, creation is paramount because it represents the model of

basis for his instruction; he warns those (including teachers in the believing community) who speak evil to their neighbor (i.e., the poor) that humanity was created in God's image (see Jas 3.11-12) and, therefore, nobody is allowed to insult others.<sup>59</sup> In this case, letter of James does not give a definite answer regarding why a teacher (who is probably also a Christian) would speak in an inconsistent and pernicious way.<sup>60</sup> Instead, the author of letter of James asks his audience to look for true wisdom (see Jas 3.13-18).<sup>61</sup>

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God's order. For detailed discussions on this topic, see Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom & Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 19-74. Murphy, *The Tree*, 111-131.

59. The reason that no one may curse other persons is that "men have been made in God's likeness." This allusion (probably quotation) is taken from Genesis 1.26-27. From the vantage point of creation theology, a health society will be formed when creation order is preserved; this means that the refusal to abide by this order (such as cursing others) could bring disharmony to society (community). A vestige of creation theology could be found also in James 2.16. In fact, the illustration about the body without the spirit was probably an allusion or echo taken from the story of human creation (Gn 2.7).

60. The expression "ou crh," ("ought not/should not") in James 3.10 does not indicate that the inconsistent speaking is impossible to happen in the believing community (see McCartney, *James*, 192-193), instead, the author uses it to show an irony that happened in the believing community.

61. Compare McKnight, *The Letter*, 296-297. J. A. Kirk compared how the gospel traditions, letters of Paul, and the early Jewish literature used the concept of wisdom and argues that wisdom in LOJ refers to the Holy Spirit (see W. R. Baker, "Searching for the Holy Spirit in the letter of James," *Tyndale Bulletin* 59.2, (2008): 293-315; and, in particular, Davids 1982, 51-56). Kirk's proposal is debatable. Although the image of wisdom in the wisdom tradition sometimes is described as a divine being (cf. Prv 8), wisdom in NT writings is mainly associated with Christ (cf. Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 201-208).

Thus, the three qualities of the wisdom tradition discussed by Bartholomew and O'Dowd (the fear of the Lord, understanding and reality) are also present in letter of James. This shows that the similarity between letter of James and the wisdom tradition is not limited to similarity in vocabulary, literary styles, and forms, but it also shares similarity of approach and perspective. Similar to the wisdom tradition, letter of James builds its tradition from reality; and following the wisdom tradition, letter of James encourages its audience to search for true wisdom (Jas 1.5-8; 3.13-18) because it will help them live in accord with their belief.

### **The Letter of James and Its Literary Composition**

While letter of James and the wisdom tradition share similar emphases (that is, the importance of trust and obedience), a similar approach (constructing their teachings from contexts/reality), and similar vocabulary (such as, wisdom and wealth), according to some scholars, they also share a complicated literary composition.<sup>62</sup> Some scholars believe that both wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs, Job or

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62. David R. Bauer, "Literary Interpretation, NT," In *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Vol 3*, ed K. D. Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008): 672-673, defines literary criticism as an effort to employ "the text as a mirror, so as to derive meaning from within the text itself." Literary criticism begins with the assumption that literary styles/forms used in writings could reflect *Sitz im Leben* and the purpose of authors. Since writers deliberately choose to use literary forms in accord with their purpose and since every literary form has its own *Sitz im Leben*, the study on literary genre and literary form could give major contribution to the biblical interpretation.

Qoheleth) and letter of James are a compendium of theological sources/traditions collected without any structured connection, but others argue that there is coherent structure in these books.<sup>63</sup> In this section, we will discuss how to understand the complicated literary composition of letter of James.

There are four proposals regarding the literary forms of letter of James: (i) homily, (ii) paraenetic discourse, (iii) literary forms of the wisdom tradition (wisdom paraenesis or wisdom instructions), and (iv) letter.<sup>64</sup>

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63. T. Longman III, "Proverbs 1: Book of." In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed. by T. Longman III & Peter Enns (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 548-549. see J.H. Walton, "Job 1: Book of." In *Dictionary of Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings*, edited by T. Longman III & P. Enns, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 342. W. Sibley Towner, "The Book of Ecclesiastes: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," In *The New Interpreter's Bible Vol V: Introduction to Wisdom Literature, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs Wisdom, Sirach*, ed. Leander E. Keck, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 270, 276-278. D. A. Carson, and D. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 619-620

64. Some scholars also propose farewell sayings and Greek diatribe (see Cheung. *The Genre*, 49. 1-52). Cheung shows that the theory of farewell sayings lacks evidence. Diatribe could be used in James 2.14-26; however, it is debatable if diatribe should be identified as a literary form or a literary style. At the same time, the wisdom tradition was familiar to the literary form "dialogue" that shares similar characteristics with diatribe (cf. Crenshaw. *Urgent Advice*, 67-70). Further studies are needed to determine which literary style used in LOJ.

## 1. The Letter of James as Homily

Some scholars, such as Thyen,<sup>65</sup> Aune,<sup>66</sup> and Heil,<sup>67</sup> believe that the basic literary form of letter of James is a homily or a collection of homilies. Overman (1992, 280-282) discusses "homily" in New Testament writings and argues that although it was mainly used in the 3rd century AD and afterwards, (he agrees with L. Wills) "homily" and *tou/ logou thj paraklhsewj* ("word of exhortation") mentioned in Hebrews 13.22 are probably identical.<sup>68</sup> The form of "homily" and "word of exhortation" generally have three main elements, namely "exempla," "conclusion," and "therefore."<sup>69</sup> The

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65. Cheung, *The Genre*, 9-11.

66. David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*. Library of Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 197-198

67. J. P. Heil, *The Letter of James: Worship to Live by* (Eugene: Cascade, 2012)

68. Although there are indications that homilies or sermons existed in the early church worships (e.g., 1 Cor 14; 1 Tm 3.2), it is debatable if any written sermon within the NT writings could be found. The "word of exhortation" in the letter to the Hebrews could be used to refer to synagogue sermons (compare Aune, *The New Testament*, 221-213; P. H. R. Van Houwelingen, "The Epistle to the Hebrews: Faith Means Perseverance," *Journal of Early Christian History* 3.1, 2013: 100-101, but it is not clear if the whole book of Hebrews is a single sermon, or if it contains some sermons, or if it was taken from a collection of sermon.

69. William R. Stegner, "The Ancient Jewish Synagogue Homily," In *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres*, ed. David E. Aune (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988): 51-69, discusses the ancient Jewish synagogue homily and NT homily and finds that there are similarities between Jewish homily and NT homily. They shared "formal characteristics" in which they used "inclusio" to begin and end a homily (the "inclusio" could be a quotation from scripture or certain emphases used in the beginning and the end of homily) and also shared "a common view of reality" in which everyday life activity and reality were used as a key to unlock a mystery (difficult subjects) or to understand scripture.



"exempla" generally was taken from Scripture and used to build authors' argument; based on the "exempla", authors usually made a conclusion and its implications.<sup>70</sup> Since the three elements of homily appear in letter of James (e.g., Jas 5.7-11), it is possible that the author of letter of James adopts a sermon and reapplies it in accord with his purpose. In addition, the "inclusio" used in letter of James (beginning in Jas 1.2-3 and ending in Jas 5.13-18 with the same emphases i.e., the importance of faith) indicates that the letter seems to share the same characteristic with a Jewish homily. Similarly, Heil argues the fact that letter of James uses "inclusio" and "chiasmus" in its structure suggests that letter of James was a homily, which was most likely intended for public reading during worship (services); additionally, he shows that letter of James has eleven "microchiastic" units,<sup>71</sup> and the central structure of letter of James reflects the notion of "worshiping God in humility" (Jas 3. 11-18; cf. Karris 2013, 798-799).<sup>72</sup>

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70. The element of "therefore"; James L. Bailey, and L. D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1992), 191. For example, the three elements of homily could be found in Hebrews 2.5-3.6; Hebrews 2.5-8a and 12-13 could be the "exempla," and Hebrews 2.8b-11 and 14-18 could be the "conclusion," and Hebrews 3.1-6 is probably the "implication." These three elements of sermon were not always arranged sequentially; and sometimes the elements of "conclusion" and "implication" could be mixed in a sentence (e.g., Heb 1.5-2.4).

71. cf. Daniel J., Harrington, Review of *The Letter of James: Worship to Live by* written by J. P. Heil. 2012. (Eugene: Cascade. *New Testament Abstracts* 57.1): 186.

72. Heil, *The Letter*, 1-5, 26. Heil uses syntax analysis and argues against the thematic approach. He believes that the thematic approach is subjective. Although his argumentation is reasonable that many scholars

## 2. The Letter of James as Paraenetic (Hellenistic Moral) Discourse

Scholars such as Johnson<sup>73</sup> and Hartin<sup>74</sup> support the proposal of letter of James as a paraenetic discourse. The Hellenistic moral discourses have two interrelated literary forms, namely protreptic discourses (moral discourses that are arranged with sustained argument) and paraenetic discourses (moral discourses that are arranged from a series of sayings; cf. Hartin.<sup>75</sup> Johnson believes that both literary forms are used in letter of James (e.g., Jas 1.22-25; 2.1-12)<sup>76</sup>. Furthermore, Bailey and Vander Broek show that paraenetic discourses could be divided into “topoi” (paraenesis that is arranged based on a certain theme) and “admonition” (paraenesis that is arranged loosely); both types of paraenesis are also dominant in the letter of James.<sup>77</sup> There are three “topoi” in letter of James, namely

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(such as Davids 1982) who use the thematic approach in understanding the structure of LOJ find what they want to find, but same result follows with those who use syntax analysis. Heil, Bauckham, and McCartney, for example, also use syntax analysis but they come to different conclusions.

73. Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 16-24.

74. Hartin, *James*, 10-16.

75. Cf. Hartin, *James*, 10-11. According to Bailey, and Vander Broek. *Literary Forms*, 62. Paraenesis typically uses the imperative mood. At the same time, the use of the imperative mood is also prominent within the wisdom tradition. Johnson. *The Letter of James*, 20, defines protreptic discourses as exhortations used to talk about specific issues and paraenesis as a method for talking about broader issues. Both discourses use memory, model, imitation, and maxims to generate exhortations. For a detailed discussion on this subject, see Leo G. Perdue, and John G. Gammie, eds. *Paraenesis: Act and Form*. Semeia 50 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990).

76. Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 16-21.

77. Bailey and Vander Broek, *Literary Forms*, 195-198. Bailey and Vander Broek (p. 196) discuss two main issues in the study of paraenesis that are still debatable, namely (i) how to understand the relation between

James 2.1-13 "partiality," James 2.14-26 "faith and work," James 3.1-12 "Christian speech"; and the "admonition" can be seen in James 1.2-27, 5.7-20.

### 3. The Letter of James as Wisdom Paraenesis or Wisdom Instruction

Letter of James employs literary forms used in the wisdom tradition. Bauckham<sup>78</sup> proposes that letter of James is as wisdom paraenesis. His proposal is based on the similarity in literary form/style between letter of James and wisdom literature, such as Proverbs, Wisdom of Solomon, and Ben Sirach.<sup>79</sup> He discovers that letter of James adopts five different forms from wisdom paraenesis, namely, aphorism (e.g., Jas 1.12), similitude and parable (e.g., Jas 2.26), examples or models (e.g., Jas 2.21-25), prophetic judgment oracle (e.g., Jas 5.1-6), and diatribe (e.g., Jas 2.18-23). Similarly, Cheung<sup>80</sup> argues that the literary form of letter of James is wisdom instruction; he believes that the subject matter of letter of James is

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one "topoi" and others (ii) how to understand *Sitz im Leben* of "topoi" (p. 196). Bailey and Vander Broek (p. 62-63) follow Mullins' theory to identify "topoi" based on (at least) three basic elements: "injunction, reason, and discussion."

78. Bauckham, *James*, 29-60.

79. As has been said, LOJ and wisdom literature basically share poetic styles. Anaphora and parallelism are two examples of literary forms that are used in poetic literature. Although wisdom literature uses many poetic styles and forms (see Bartholomew & O'Dowd, *Old Testament*, 57-67), it does not mean that all texts using poetic style and form are a part of wisdom literature because the poetic styles and forms also are used in the Prophetic books (see, e.g., Is 1.2-2.5).

80. Cheung, *The Genre*, 49.

indebted to the themes and ideas that become the generic character of the wisdom instruction.<sup>81</sup> However, it is difficult to identify a generic character of the wisdom tradition based on themes and ideas used in this literature. If there is a theme that could become the generic character of the wisdom tradition, it is probably “fear of the Lord.” But “fear of the Lord” is not primarily designated as a theme in the wisdom tradition but as the approach to gaining wisdom.

#### 4. The Letter of James as a Pastoral Letter

The prescript of letter of James (Jas 1.1) shows that it is a letter. Although scholars generally agree that “letter” is the form of letter of James, many doubt that letter of James is a “real letter.”<sup>82</sup> For example, Aune says “General letters (except Romans) tend to be both *late* and *pseudonymous* [italics his]. The second-century church

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81. Cheung apparently does not offer a clear definition of the term “wisdom instruction.” According to Perdue, *The Sword*, 80-84, there are many literary forms in wisdom literature, such as *māšāl*, *mūsār/tôrâ* “instruction,” *mišlê/dibrê*, poems, dialogue, narrative, and others. It is not clear whether Cheung uses the term “wisdom instruction” to refer to a specific literary form, such as *mūsār* in wisdom literature, or if he is using it to refer generally to the literary form used within the wisdom tradition.

82. A. Deissmann divided ancient letters into “real” and “non-real” categories; while the “real letters” are warm and personal, the “non-real letters” are cold and impersonal (directed to general audiences) (cf. Stanley K Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 17-18. Although this proposal has influenced many scholars, it is oversimplified because ancient letters are more complicated than what Deissmann has proposed. Additionally, there are many categories could be used to identify an ancient letter (for more detailed discussions on this study, see Stowers, *Letter Writing*; Weima (2000, 640-644).

preferred to understand apostolic letters in terms of their universal applicability rather than in terms of the particular situations in which they originated."<sup>83</sup> However, some scholars have shown that the definition of a "real letter" is ambiguous.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, neither internal nor external evidence convincingly supports the argument that letter of James is pseudonymous.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, rather than identifying letter of James as a "non-real letter," Bauckham argues that letter of James should be read as "the paraenetic encyclical letter"; he says<sup>86</sup>:

"But an official letter or encyclical is no less a 'real' letter, i.e., a document which could have been actually sent, by the hand of a messenger or messengers, from an author resident in one place to recipients living elsewhere. If it was really sent, no doubt several copies would have been dispatched to important communities of Christian Jews in the Diaspora ...

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83. Aune, *The New Testament*, 218. Apart from the opening, missing from LOJ are basic elements of ancient letters, like greeting, doxology, and farewell. In addition, the format of LOJ is quite different compared to the letters of Paul; therefore, some scholars doubt that LOJ could be identified as a letter. However, Bauckham argues that the opening section in James 1.1 meets the essential criterion of a real letter.

84. See Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 22-24. See Bauckham, *James*, 11-13. Aune, *The New Testament*, 192-197) shows that the literary form of letters in the first century is complicated. There are at least two kinds of letters based on literary form (i.e., liturgical and paraenetic forms). Additionally, in light of ancient rhetorical styles, a letter could be identified as discourses of Greco-Roman rhetoric, discourses of Greco-Roman diatribe, or discourses of Jewish synagogue homily. Ancient letters also could be identified based on their functions like friendship, filial, business, or apologia (see the excellent study on this subject in Stowers, *Letter Writing*).

85. See McKnight, *The Letter*, 23-38. Carson, and D. Moo, *An Introduction*, 621-626.

86. Bauckham, *James*, 11-28.

An appropriate term for the kind of letter James is might be 'paraenetic encyclical.' The usual form of paraenetic letter (a letter offering exhortation or advice on the conduct of life) in the ancient world was addressed to an individual<sup>87</sup> but Jews and Christians wrote paraenesis in letter-form to communities or to circulate among communities."

A similar proposal comes from Batten who observes the rhetorical elements in letter of James and concludes that the letter could be seen as a letter of Greco-Roman rhetoric.<sup>88</sup>

The context of letter of James and the literary style used in the letter show that letter of James is a pastoral letter. The literary context of letter of James shows that it is sent to help believers facing suffering (see, e.g., Jas 1.1-12, 5.7-11). At the same time, the letter also shows that author has an intense concern for encouraging believers to live out their confession of faith in concrete ways, such as caring for widows and orphans (Jas 1.27), honoring the poor, and showing impartiality (Jas 2.1-9). Furthermore, there is also indication that letter of James is addressed to believers who are dealing with the problem of inauthentic teachers, people who do not living according to true belief (Jas 3.1, 9). These indications show that although letter of James makes use of Jewish homily, Hellenistic

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87. Stowers, *Letter Writing*, 91-124.

88. Alicia J. Batten, *Friendship and Benefaction in James*. Emory Studies in Early Christianity 15. ed. V. K. Robbins & D. B. Gowler (Blandford Forum: deo, 2010) Batten analyzes James 1.2-18, 2.1-26, and 3.13-4.10, which are the texts she chooses to exemplify the themes of "friendship and benefaction". She concludes (p. 178) that "James consists mainly of deliberative rhetoric, however, and as such it seeks to encourage and convince its recipients to 'convert' or change their behavior in some way."

paraenesis, and wisdom paraenesis (or wisdom instructions), the main purpose of the letter is basically pastoral. Therefore, based on its literary context, it is still reasonable to argue that the letter of James should be seen mainly as a pastoral letter.

To evaluate the complexities of literary forms in letter of James, it seems instructive to compare letter of James with wisdom literature. Similar to letter of James, wisdom literature in the Hellenistic period, like Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon, also have complicated literary forms.<sup>89</sup> For example, the Wisdom of Solomon has some literary genres/forms, including diatribe, eulogy, Midrash, and apocalyptic.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Sirach uses truth statement, instruction, prayer, and hymn as literary forms.<sup>91</sup> The eclectic espousal of literary genres and traditions is characteristic of the wisdom tradition; this could be the reason why there are similarities in literary forms and

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89. Besides Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon, other writings in wisdom literature also have complicated literary forms. For example, Crenshaw, *Urgent Advice*, 68, notes that in the book of Job, "no single genre can explain all the facets of the book." Similarly, Qoheleth also has various literary forms, like autobiography, proverb, allegory, and others (see Crenshaw, *Urgent Advice*, 21. It is probably Proverbs that has unified forms, but the literary structure of this book is also complex (see Crenshaw, *Urgent Advice*, 19-20).

90. Cf. Michael Kolarcik, "The Book of Wisdom: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," In *NIB Vol 5: Introduction to Wisdom Literature, Proverb, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach*, ed. Leander E. Keck. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 443.

91. Cf. James L. Crenshaw, "The Book of Sirach: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections." In *NIB Vol 5: Introduction to Wisdom Literature, Proverb, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 613-620.

traditions between biblical wisdom literature and ancient Near East wisdom traditions. Therefore, it is unsurprising to discover so many diverse literary forms in letter of James, especially since it takes on the eclectic mode of the wisdom tradition;<sup>92</sup> and, Bauckham's proposal that letter of James uses wisdom paraenesis, a kind of literary that combines wisdom literary styles and paraenesis, is reasonable.<sup>93</sup> It is also possible that the author of letter of James adopts and reapplies a homily to his letter.<sup>94</sup>

The mixed literary composition of letter of James means the letter should be read in the richness of its literary forms.<sup>95</sup> Every

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92. Similar to the character of the wisdom tradition that is traditional (wisdom tradition always make use of other traditions and forms its own traditions), LOJ could also be making use of other teachings/traditions (e.g., the wisdom of Jesus or Jesus' tradition, the wisdom tradition, and others), synthesizing and improving its own tradition of sorts (what we could call it the "wisdom of James").

93. Based on how the author of LOJ arranges his argumentation to persuade his audience, James 5.7-12 could be seen as a "protreptic discourse" (for further discussion on the structure of argument in this passage, see McKnight, *The Letter*, 400-422). The same text also contains a wisdom instruction, which James 5.9 typifies; the teaching in this passage (Jas 5.7-12) is probably influenced by the tradition of Job. Some scholars (e.g., Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 316-317) argue that the tradition of the "law of love" in Leviticus 19 is behind James 5.9. This interpretation is also reasonable because the wisdom tradition is able to absorb many traditions, including Deuteronomic traditions, Leviticus 19 being a good example of this.

94. In James 5.7-18, the author of LOJ probably made use of a tradition that is previously used in a homily. The three elements of the homily can be found in this passage: the "exempla" (Jas 5.10, 17-18), the "conclusion" (Jas 5.11), and the "implication" (Jas 5.7-9, 13-16).

95. Bauckham, *James*, 35, proposes that scholars need to give more attention to the literary forms of LOJ. Although he is correct that the richness of literary forms used in LOJ is important and could contribute to



literary form used in letter of James is important and they likely indicate author's purpose. For instance, letter of James uses the literary form of *sorites* ("step saying") in James 1.3-4<sup>96</sup> to teach that testing should be seen in light of faith.<sup>97</sup> The *sorites* is used mnemonically to help the recipients remember what they have been taught; put differently, when the author of letter of James uses this literary form, he wants his audience always to remember that faith is the key to understanding testing (i.e., sufferings).

In addition, letter of James should be read as a unified discourse. Although letter of James probably makes use of some traditions, when they are collected in a discourse, they become interconnected. For example, the teachings of faith in James 2.14-26 may have originated from an independent tradition, but when the author placed it after James 1.19-2.13, they become interconnected and form a discourse about true faith and suffering. At the same time, the author of letter of James deliberately makes the structure of

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understanding James's teachings, unfortunately, there are still no materials that seriously address this issue.

96. Bauckham, *James*, 44-45.

97. The command for believers to rejoice when they face trials or sufferings must be given in the context of faith. McKnight, *The Letter*, 71 believes that "To 'consider' trials as an occasion of joy involves an act of faith, for instead of looking *at* the trial, the messianic Jewish community is instead encouraged to look *through* the trial to its potential outcome [italics his]." Similarly, McCartney, *James*, 85. Believes that "James ... encourages his hearers to think differently than they might be inclined to think, knowing that when faith is tested, it is proven genuine by the test and become purer and stronger as a result."

James 2.1-26 parallel to James 3.1-18.<sup>98</sup> The parallelism between these passages is not only in a structure but also in a theme; while James 2.1-26 is about true faith that leads believers to love and care the poor, James 3.1-18 is about integrated true faith that makes believers speak in accord with God's will.

Even so, why did the early church need the "wisdom of James?" The answer to this question depends on the identification of the hearers of letter of James and how the purpose of letter of James is understood. Unfortunately, scholars disagree on both of these points.<sup>99</sup> Although this letter was explicitly sent to *taij dwdeka ful ai j taij en th| diaspora|* this phrase is quite opaque, creating the possibility for various interpretations.<sup>100</sup> However, Van Unnik (1983, 95-105) observes the term diaspora/| in the early Christian traditions and finds that the term is not applied to the Christian church. In other words, the term is used in a literal way and not used as a metaphor for Christians. Therefore, Bauckham's proposal is reasonable when he states that "diaspora" refers to Jewish believers both in the western (Mediterranean) and eastern (Babylonian) areas of the Roman Empire. In addition, based on the message of letter of James, some real life issues (especially, suffering, partiality, disputes,

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98. McCartney, *James*, 65.

99. Cf. Allison Jr, *A Critical*, 32-50.

100. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Allison Jr, *A Critical*, 127-133.

hypocrisy, and so on) in this letter could mirror situations and conditions faced in the believing community in the diaspora.<sup>101</sup>

Since James is the leader of the early church and his voice and wisdom are considered by the early church as the voice of their shepherd, it is important to note that his teachings, which are rich in wisdom, were most likely collected and sent to believers "in diaspora." The wisdom of James will help them face their real life issues. By using the approach of the wisdom tradition, the author of letter of James emphasizes that the beginning of wisdom is faith, the center of wisdom teachings is also faith, and the outcome of wisdom teachings is, likewise, faith in God.

## **Conclusion**

The wisdom tradition clearly has an important role in letter of James. The wisdom tradition not only influences the ethical teachings of letter of James, but it also influences its theological approach. Like the wisdom tradition, letter of James helps believers build theology from reality and understand it in light of God's perspective. To understand the reality, believers need wisdom, and to gain wisdom, believers need to have faith. In other words, it is faith that makes believers wisely understand and face many real life issues (e.g., suffering, partiality, false teachers, bickering, and more) in their community, instructing them to view circumstances from a divine point of view. From this perspective, "faith" in letter of James is not

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101. Bauckham, *James*, 15-16.

only a part of the message of the letter, but it is also the principle of wisdom; it is the key to understanding reality based on God's perspective. The wisdom tradition also influences letter of James in which its flexibility in using other traditions and other literary forms makes the composition of letter of James rich, albeit complicated. Although the author of letter of James makes use of sundry traditions and varied literary forms in his letter, letter of James is a unified discourse. Therefore, to understand the concept of faith in letter of James, interpreters should understand the letter in the context of both the macro and micro structures (discourses) within it and should consider literary forms and styles used by its author to express and to enrich the meaning of "faith" in his discourse/letter.

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