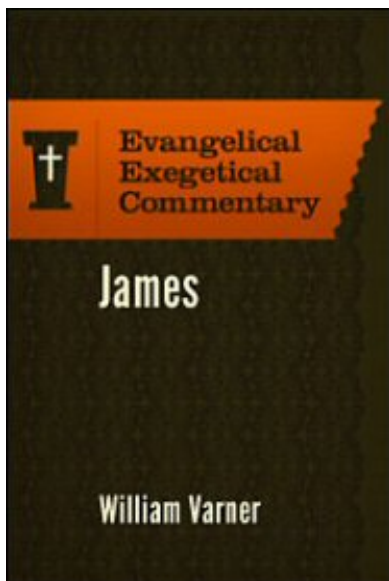


Review for Logos Bible Software (July 2013)



William Varner.

James. Evangelical Exegetical Commentary.

Eds. H. Wayne House, W. Hall Harris III, and Andrew W. Pitts. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012. NP. ISBN N/A. \$33.21 (Electronic).

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William Varner is no stranger to the Epistle of James. Prior to this full-scale commentary, Varner wrote a discourse commentary on the Greek text of James (*The Book of James: A New Perspective*; [Amazon](#), [Logos](#)) and a devotional commentary for a more general audience (*To Love God and To Love Others: A Devotional Commentary on James*; [Logos](#)). Varner has tested these ideas both in the classroom and the pulpit, and this experience has left a mark on his understanding of James. In this commentary, Varner has weaved together warm pastoral reflection with erudite scholarship.

This *James* commentary is among the first volumes released in the ECC series (Evangelical Exegetical Commentary; [Logos](#)) published by Logos. The editors reveal the purpose and presuppositions undergirding this series. Though each author will have various strengths and weaknesses, they are committed to an “evangelical faith and a careful exegesis of the biblical text.” Moreover, each author affirms “historic, orthodox Christianity and the inspiration and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures.” Each volume, then, will contain a similar methodological creed. After using this commentary, the intended audience is the pastor, any student of the Bible, and scholar because of its emphasis on the biblical languages, detailed and theological analysis, and devotional implications.

Varner’s commentary begins with an introduction to James, commentary on the text, excursuses, and a valuable bibliography. In his masterfully, well-written introduction, he attempts to interact widely with scholarship, keeping a finger on the biblical data, and incorporating inter-testamental literature into his arguments. Varner’s experience with the Greek language enhances his comments

about the Greek style of James. Taking a fresh and helpful approach to the book's structure, his predilection to discourse analysis enables him to bring clarity to a convoluted topic. There are two discourse devices: (1) a nominative of address; (2) an imperative command or rhetorical question.

1. Prescript 1:1
2. Be Joyful in Trials 1:2–15
3. Do Not Be Deceived about God's Goodness 1:16–18
4. Become a Good Hearer/Doer of the Word 1:19–27
5. Do Not Show Favoritism 2:1–13
6. Show Your Faith by Your Works 2:14–26
7. Be Consistent in Your Speech 3:1–12
8. Follow the Wisdom of God 3:13–18 (*THEMATIC PEAK*)
9. Become a Friend of God 4:1–10 (*HORTATORY PEAK*)
10. Do Not Speak Against One Another 4:11–12
11. Do Not Plan Presumptuously 4:13–17
12. You Rich Should Treat the Poor Justly 5:1–6
13. Wait Patiently for the Lord's Coming 5:7–11
14. Do Not Swear but Pray 5:12–18
15. Convert the Erring Brother 5:19–20

This is a fresh outline to the structure of James, and one I find rather convincing and beneficial to this discussion. Varner explains why Jas 2:5 was not used to mark a separate section (Jas 2:1–4; 2:5–13). Though it contains a nominative of address (*ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί*) and an imperative (*ἀκούσατε*), it does not have a “new semantic theme.”

Commenting on the text, a vast array of information is readily available for the reader. Here one will find a keen handling of Greek grammar, regularly interacting with Wallace, Porter, and BDF, and interaction with the broader theological implications of the OT and NT. Each section contains the following material:

1. Introduction
2. Outline (*Exegetical*)
3. Original Text
4. Textual Notes (i.e. Text Critical Notes)
5. Translation
6. Commentary
7. Biblical Theology Comments
8. Application and Devotional Implications
9. Selected Bibliography

Varner has an exemplary exegetical method whereby there is engagement with text critical evaluations, pertinent Greek grammatical notes, broader interpretational and biblical theological implications, sermon assistance for expositors, and encouragement for further analysis with a specialized and focused bibliography.

Varner's commentary ends with three excursuses and an extended bibliography. Each excursus could be longer and more developed but nonetheless keep the reader engaged in a few items of interpretational concern. The excursuses are: (1) Excursus on Scot McKnight's Treatment of James 2:18; (2) Excursus on James 3:1–12: Can the Tongue Really Be Controlled?; and, (3) Excursus on Wisdom in James.

Commentaries can sometimes be one-sided. That is, they either focus on textual analysis while sometimes neglecting the bigger picture or vice-versa. The uniqueness of Varner's contribution to the plethora of commentaries, especially Jacobean studies, is his ability to balance both the minutia of textual features and connecting them with broader theological implications. Secondly, Varner has previously engaged discourse analysis and has incorporated features of this discipline into this commentary. "The recent application," Varner explains, "by a number of scholars of fresh linguistic methods to exegetical analysis also demands an occasional fresh examination of familiar biblical books and passages." Furthermore, according to Varner, there is an emerging appreciation for James, though no consensus has formed relating James to his letter. Varner briefly engages this discussion, offering his analysis and perspective. Finally, this commentary widely interacts with Jacobean scholarship, while ably providing a unique voice to the on-going conversation.

There are, however, a few critiques. Electronic sources have their respective advantages and disadvantages. Though some electronic reference works have page numbers, this one does not. As is seen in this review, I am unable to reference any quotes or give credit to Varner's ideas. Also, because of a lack of page numbers, it is unclear on the full length of this commentary. Using completely subjective criteria (Times New Roman, 12pt., single-spaced), I copied the entire commentary into a Word.doc in order to see its full length: i–x Title Page, Acknowledgements, and Abbreviations; 1–46 Introduction; 47–315 Commentary; 315–330 Concluding thoughts on James, Excursus, and Bibliography. If this electronic source is ever put into book form, which is set to happen in the future, the book could potentially be 300+pp.

A second critique is more of a concern with its association with Logos policy. Throughout the time of its publication it has been sold as an individual volume and with the entire ECC collection. At the time of this review, it is currently sold as an individual volume. My concern is if Logos decides to no longer sell this as an individual book again, it may truncate wider usage because users will have to purchase the entire set in order to use Varner's commentary. Pastors, theological students, or other scholars may not have the funds for the entire commentary series. Therefore, single volume sales for Logos and broader interaction with this commentary will increase if sold as a single entity, even though the commentary series looks promising.

For furthering discussion on Jacobean scholarship, and especially use of this commentary, it may be beneficial to see an updated version of this commentary by making use of the twenty-eighth edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA²⁸). When written, the NA²⁷ and UBS⁴ were the recognized Greek texts and Varner, consequently, did not have access to the NA²⁸. The difference between the NA²⁷ and the NA²⁸, due to *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior*, is textual changes in the Catholic Epistles, including James. No textual change would affect the commentary per se, yet an updated text critical discussion and the use of the NA²⁸ text would bring the commentary up to modern textual use. The changes are in word order, elisions of letters, uses of the article, and one edition of εἰμί: Jas 1:20, 26; 2:3, 4, 15; 3:15; 4:10. Varner will incorporate the NA²⁸ and relevant comments in upcoming revisions.

There cannot be enough praise given to this commentary and I highly encourage pastors, students, and scholars alike to interact and engage this commentary when treading the deep waters of the book of James. I tip my hat to Logos and the respective editors for their choice of William Varner.

He provided a masterful job at engaging scholarship, providing a critical Evangelical argument, demonstrating aptitude of Greek and issues there-within, all the while maintaining a solid and steady voice for the church. He has helped set a bar for the usefulness of this series and trust this source will be a voice within the future of Jacobean scholarship.