

James and the Wisdom Tradition

The Letter of James exhibits these common features of wisdom literature.

James Tries to Reason with His Readers

- He uses expressions such as "Come now, you who say . . ." (4:13) and "Come now, you rich people . . ." (5:1).
- His letter is peppered with words such as "because" and "for," which introduce reasons for the points that he is making (1:3, 20, 23; 2:10–11, 13, 26; 3:1–2, 16; 4:14), and words such as "therefore" and "so," which introduce conclusions to be derived from what he has said (1:21; 2:17, 23; 4:12, 17; 5:7, 16).
- Sometimes James asks his readers to consider the benefit or profit of their actions: "What good is it?" (2:14); "What is the good of that?" (2:16; see also 1:16, 20, 26; 2:20, 26; 4:5).

James Uses Secular Images Drawn from the World at Large

- the billowing sea (1:6)
- the scorching sun (1:11)
- a reflection in a mirror (1:23–24)
- a bit in a horse's mouth (3:3)
- a ship's rudder (3:4)
- a forest fire (3:5)
- domestication of animals (3:7)
- a freshwater spring (3:11)
- a fig tree (3:12)
- a grapevine (3:12)
- salt water (3:12)
- a vanishing mist (4:14)
- the rainy seasons for crops (5:7)

In both of these ways, James presents his teaching as "common sense": he is advocating the wisest course of action, as should be obvious from logical reasoning and observation of nature.