

Reading James Through the Lens of God's Mission

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

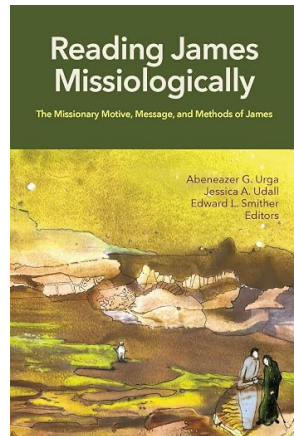
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Reading James Missiologically is a comprehensive volume edited by **Abeneazer Urga**, **Jessica Udall**, and **Edward Smither**, all of whom serve as professors at Columbia International University; **Urga** and **Udall** also teach at Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology in Addis Ababa. This significant work features eighteen chapters authored by various contributors, each focusing on the Epistle of James through three primary missiological themes: motivation, message, and method. The book seeks to highlight the importance of the general epistles within the context of missions, presenting fresh insights that combine scholarly research with the authors' personal experiences. By faithfully interpreting the text's original intent, the contributors aim to inspire readers to adopt a mission-oriented perspective as they engage with Scripture in today's world.

The first part of the text includes seven chapters that examine different interpretations of the biblical book of James. **Allen Yeh** begins the discussion by addressing common misreadings of James and advocating for a comprehensive understanding that highlights the importance of a systematic approach to both evangelism and social justice. Following him, **James A. Roh** provides insights into how James's view of soteriology can serve as a framework for a missiological interpretation of the text. **Christopher Howles** discusses



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C. René Padilla's idea of integral mission, emphasizing how proclamation and social action support each other as key to James's message. **Benjamin A. Castenada** then offers an eschatological view, proposing that James interprets missiological ideas through the lens of Israel's restoration. This theme persists in **Jeffrey S. Krohn's** contribution, which investigates the link between eschatology and mission, particularly focusing on insights from the majority world.

In his exploration of recent theological insights, **Nelson R. Morals Fredes** emphasizes the importance of social contexts in understanding God's mission for the impoverished. He highlights the need to pay attention to the poor to fulfill the *missio ecclesiae*. In this divine mission, he argues, the poor hold a significant place. Put simply, he notes that there should be an alignment between *Missio Dei* and *Missio Ecclesiae*. **Jessica Janvier** provides a thoughtful analysis of Rahab's story as presented in the book of James, emphasizing its importance to modern missiology. In her analysis, **Janvier** emphasizes the transformative story of Rahab, a prostitute, to highlight the limitations of traditional mission strategies that often center on confessionalism and sacramentalism. She argues that effective mission work must extend beyond simply planting churches; it should also demonstrate genuine respect for the communities being served. Without this respect, there is a risk that future generations may question the morality of mission efforts and the authority of Scripture itself. **Janvier** draws important lessons from Rahab's narrative, suggesting that they are highly relevant to contemporary missionary practices.

In the second part of the book, **Edward L. Smither** explores the holistic mission James presents, highlighting the importance of his teachings for the entire human experience. He shows how early church fathers embraced and adapted these teachings to their own contexts. Smither proposes that by engaging with James's message and incorporating historical church practices, the modern global church can strengthen its mission efforts. Additionally, **Vuyani S. Sindo** examines Christian identity through a covenant perspective, emphasizing James's insights into the relationship between the poor and the wealthy within the Christian community. He points out that indifference to the suffering of the poor contradicts the core message of Christianity. **Sindo** observes that discrimination against the poor is still widespread, especially in the majority world, making James's teachings particularly relevant and corrective today.

In his exploration of the book of James, **James E. Morrison** examines the importance of the "doers of the word" in understanding the Christian mission. By highlighting figures such as Abraham, Rahab, Job, and Elijah, **Morrison** argues that James shifts the gospel message to suit specific contexts, thereby

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supporting the practical view of *conversion* in translation. **Leita Ngoy** adds to this discussion by connecting the theology of mission with prosperity, emphasizing that this idea is rooted in practical theology and focuses on the ethical behavior of believers. **Ngoy's** perspective reflects James's holistic view of prosperity, suggesting that true wealth comes from spiritual growth and ethical living rather than simply material possessions, which should be used as resources for mission.

Part three delves into the theme of mission in the book of James, emphasizing mercy as a pivotal aspect. **John D. Harvey** asserts that James mirrors Jesus's teachings from the Sermon on the Mount, particularly the notion that God blesses the merciful, as seen in Matthew 5:7. **Harvey** notes that James reinforces this idea by indicating that those who show mercy can expect mercy from God during judgment (Jas 2:13). He argues that mercy reflects God's divine nature and is essential for fostering endurance in proclaiming the gospel, forming a critical part of the larger mission. **Joseph K. Pak** then explores the relationship between the poor and the rich within the framework of God's mission. He interprets James's message, advising that the poor should not condemn the rich but rather endure the injustices they face. **Pak** emphasizes the importance of seeking divine intervention and praying for the salvation of the rich as part of their Christian calling.

Sarah Lunsford also shares insights on how James offers wisdom for managerial missions, advocating reliance on faith rather than the scientific method often favored in modern practice. Focusing on James 4:13–17, she argues that such missions should be entirely dependent on God. Lunsford calls for a shift away from a double-minded, self-reliant attitude, urging believers to embrace wisdom rooted in sincere reliance on God's integrity, grounded in his goodness and mission. **Thomas W. Sekler** explores the teaching and missiological implications of James 3:1–2, emphasizing the significant responsibility of teachers to demonstrate mature character. He suggests that teachers should not only be learners themselves but also serve as disciples who guide others. This perspective highlights the importance of cross-cultural workers valuing local voices and adopting approaches that align with local customs and ideas. Moreover, **Sekler** emphasizes the necessity for these workers to teach with care, humility, and a focus on delivering messages that resonate with their audience.

Cindy M. Wu discusses James and refugees, challenging us to care for the vulnerable. She reminds us that the missiological reading of James highlights similarities between James's context and the modern refugee crisis. Wu then applies the epistle to the ministry of caring for refugees holistically and thoughtfully. She encourages readers to learn from refugees' experiences and to

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welcome them into their neighborhoods. She concludes that we should avoid discrimination or favoritism and instead adopt a diaspora mindset that reminds us, too, that we were once strangers. **Jeanne Wu** emphasizes the importance of mission in addressing an unjust world, highlighting the role of God's persevering children. Through her study of James, she underscores the need for his exhortation and wisdom, which urge believers to stay steadfast amid conflicts and injustices. Rather than spreading fear, prejudice, or hatred, **Wu** advocates sharing genuine light and joy, reminding us to see trials as opportunities to grow in faith, especially as Jesus Christ's return nears. **Grant LeMarquand** emphasizes the connection between worship and holistic mission in the book of James. He argues that the teachings in James indicate that prayer and worship must have implications for mission, particularly in how the Christian community interacts with the poor, and that this should not involve preferential treatment. Additionally, he emphasizes that prayer requests should stem from pure intentions and lead to harmonious relationships among individuals. **LeMarquand** also notes that prayers for physical healing are intertwined with the themes of forgiveness of sins, underscoring that acts of prayer and worship inherently carry a missional significance.

This collection of essays offers a deep exploration of missional theology in the Epistle of James, drawing on a variety of approaches. By combining exegetical analysis with evangelistic proclamation, it improves our understanding of God's purposes for mission. The volume fills an important gap often overlooked in missiological interpretations of James, making it a valuable resource for those dedicated to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. It addresses suffering, social issues, justice, mercy, reliance on God through faith rather than solely on scientific methods, care for the poor, a holistic approach to mission, support for refugees, respect for the cultures and traditions of those served, and prayer for the sick, Israel, and eschatology, among others.

The book ultimately presents valuable insights and scholarly contributions of significant merit. However, its impact could be further strengthened by placing a greater emphasis on issues of justice, particularly within the church. Frequently, leaders are taken advantage of by those in positions of wealth and authority, undermining missionary efforts by marginalizing the poor. Additionally, a heightened focus on spiritual warfare, as advocated in the Book of James, would encourage believers to remain vigilant in their devotion to God. This emphasis could enhance their connection with Him and equip them to resist temptations and the attacks of Satan, thereby advancing the mission work. Overall, this book serves as an excellent resource for anyone seeking to live out and share the gospel message, and I highly recommend it.