

Handout Lesson 2: The Letter of St. James

An excerpt from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger’s famous Erasmus lecture of January 27, 1988. His conclusions concerning Biblical exegesis remain an important guide for the study of sacred Scripture: *Finally, the exegete must realize that he does not stand in some neutral area, above or outside history and the Church. Such a presumed immediacy regarding the purely historical can only lead to dead ends. The first presupposition of all exegesis is that it accepts the Bible as a book. In so doing, it has already chosen a place for itself which does not simply follow from the study of literature. It has identified this particular literature as the product of a coherent history, and this history as the proper space for coming to understanding. If it wishes to be theology, it must take a further step. It must recognize that the faith of the Church is that form of "sympathia" without which the Bible remains a closed book. It must come to acknowledge this faith as a hermeneutic, the space for understanding, which does not do dogmatic violence to the Bible, but precisely allows the solitary possibility for the Bible to be itself* (Joseph Ratzinger is now our beloved Pope Benedict XVI).

Technical terms applied to the study of sacred Scripture:

- **Hermeneutics:** [Greek, *hermeneutikos*, from *hermeneus* =an interpreter (from Hermes)]. Applied to the study of Scripture: The art and science of Biblical interpretation. The “science” involves study of the ancient languages and the individual words in which a Biblical passage is written. The art involves unfolding the significance of a passage by discerning what the inspired writer meant to convey to the reader, taking into consideration the historical period, the culture of the times, and information within the entire context of the text.
- **Exegesis:** [Greek, *exegeomai*, = *ex* “to explain”, or “to take from”; and *hegeomai*, “to lead”, “to guide”]. Applied to the study of Scripture: Taking from the Biblical text the information upon which to base an interpretation. **Exegete:** One who interprets a Biblical passage or text.
- **Eisegesis:** [Greek, *eisagogilos*, from *eisago*, “to introduce” = *eis*, “in”, “into”, and *ago* = “to lead”]. Reading into the Biblical text what isn’t there in order to conform the interpretation of the text to certain preconceived ideas or theories.

Paul’s Letter to the Romans	The Letter of St. James
Address and greeting: Romans 1:1-7	Address and greeting: James 1:1
Introduction/thanksgiving prayer: Romans 1:8-15	Body of the letter: James 1:2-5:20
Body of the letter: Romans 1:16-15:3	
Conclusion and greetings: Romans 15:4-16:15	
Farewell and postscript: Romans 16:17-27	