

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

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Introduction

The Epistles of James, First and Second Peter, the three Epistles of John and the Epistle of Jude constitute the so-called Catholic, or General Epistles. They were thus named in earliest days, and in the ancient manuscripts these seven Epistles are grouped together as we have them in our English version; however, they always follow the book of Acts. It is claimed that they were named General Epistles because Christians in general are addressed in them, which does not hold good with the second and third Epistles of John, for these were addressed to individuals. The first Epistle in this group, following the book of Acts in the manuscripts, is the Epistle of James.

Its Peculiar Character

That there is a great difference between the great Pauline Epistles and the Epistle of James is seen at a glance. If one reads even the Epistle to the Hebrews, addressed to the same class of people, believing Hebrews, to whom the Epistle of James is also addressed, and reads James immediately after, a great and notable change is seen at once. The character of the Epistle of James is essentially Jewish. In the second chapter the word synagogue is used as the place of their assembly, "if there come unto your synagogue a man, etc." They were then still in the synagogue. Nothing about the Church, the body of Christ is mentioned in this Epistle, nor do we find here the great doctrines of Christianity and the corresponding Christian relationship. The law is also prominent; and there are other Jewish features which will be pointed out in the annotations. The character of the entire Epistle corresponds with those to whom the Epistle was originally addressed "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." It is evidently a document written at an early date during the transition period and before the great doctrinal Epistles of the apostle to the Gentiles had been produced, in which the fulness of redemption, the body of Christ, the church, and its unity and other cardinal doctrines of our faith are revealed.

What do we mean by "transition period"? That the beginning of Christianity had a decidedly Jewish cast is known to all Bible students. For years all the believers were Jews. There was a great Jewish-Christian assembly in Jerusalem and many more throughout Judea. As we learn from the book of Acts there were many thousands of Jews who believed, but who were

also zealous for the law; they still made use of the temple worship, went there at the accustomed hours of prayer. There were also many priests who at one time were obedient to the faith, believed that the Crucified One was the Messiah; they also continued undoubtedly in their priestly ministrations in the temple. They still had their great national hope of a restoration of the kingdom. That hope indeed was preached by Peter in Acts 3:19-20.

That the Epistle of James is put in all the ancient manuscripts next to the book of Acts is therefore of significance. We breathe in this Epistle the same Jewish-Christian atmosphere which we find in the beginning of the book of Acts.

James, the Author of the Epistle

What we have stated above identifies the author of this Epistle. Who is James (Greek: Jacobos--Jacob)? Certainly not James, the apostle, the son of Zebedee. He was martyred in the year 44, as recorded in Acts 12:2. Nor can the author be James, the son of Alphaeus, another apostle. His name is mentioned for the last time in the New Testament in Acts 1:13. We hear nothing more about him, and it is inconceivable that he should have held a position of authority which belongs to the author of this Epistle. There is another James, who is designated as "the brother of the Lord." He has been generally accepted, even by critics, as the author of the Epistle.

The Apostle Paul speaks of him in Gal. 1:19. Three years after his conversion he returned to Jerusalem to interview Peter, and Paul adds, "but of the other apostles saw I none, save James, the Lord's brother,"

James, the brother of the Lord, belongs to those mentioned in John 7:5: "For neither did His brethren believe in Him." James and his brethren did not believe on Jesus, the Virgin-born Son of God, as the Messiah. But in the first chapter of Acts we find mentioned among those who waited in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father "Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His brethren." They had been converted and were now believers. How were they convinced that Jesus was the Christ? There can be no question that the James mentioned, distinct from the apostles, in 1 Cor. 15:7, to whom the risen Christ appeared, is the brother of the Lord. He saw the Lord risen from the dead; He had appeared to him and that became the great turning point in his life and he and his brethren believed.

He early held in Jerusalem the position as leader. When Peter had been miraculously led forth from prison and appeared in the midst of a company of believers, he said, "Go show these things unto James and to the brethren" (Acts 12:17). He was the acknowledged head of the Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem. He is the spokesman in the first council held in Jerusalem, in the language of our day "the presiding officer" (Acts 15:13). Through him the Holy Spirit gave a very important revelation. Years later when Paul undertook the fateful journey to Jerusalem and had reached the city, he called on James, and after salutation reported to him "what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry." And James spoke the fatal words which enticed the Apostle Paul to conform to the keeping of the law, when James told him, "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe, and they are all zealous for the law" (Acts 21:19-26). According to ancient sources, like Eusebius, James was a godly man and a strong observer of the ceremonial law, and, though he was ready to see the hand of God in the ministry of Paul and Barnabas among the

Gentiles (confirmed by the second chapter of Galatians), he adhered closely to the law and the Judaistic form of Christianity to the end of his life. "Had not a Peter and above all Paul arisen, Christianity would perhaps never have completely emancipated from the veil of Judaism and asserted its own independence. Still, there was a necessity for the ministry of James. If any could win over the ancient covenant people it was he. It pleased God to set so high an example of Old Testament piety in its purest form among the Jews, to make conversions to the gospel, even at the eleventh hour (preceding the destruction of Jerusalem) as easy as possible for them. But when they would not listen to the voice of this last messenger of peace, then was the measure of divine patience exhausted and the fearful and long-threatened judgment broke forth. And thus the mission of James, the brother of the Lord was fulfilled. According to Hegesippus James died a year before the destruction of Jerusalem" (Dr. P. Schaff--Kirchengeschichte). The Jewish historian Josephus records this in the following paragraph: "Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but on the road, so he assembled the Sanhedrin or judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others. And when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned" (Josephus, Book 20).

For various reasons this Epistle was, even among the church fathers, treated with suspicion. It seems that the uncertainty as to the writer, and that it was addressed entirely to Jewish believers, raised these doubts. These doubts were revived during the Reformation and Luther especially called it "an Epistle of straw," meaning by it that it did not contain the wheat.

"On the whole, on any intelligent principles of canonical reception of early writings, we cannot refuse the Epistle a place in the canon. That that place was given it from the first in some parts of the church; that, in spite of many adverse circumstances, it gradually won that place in other parts; that when thoroughly considered, it is so consistent with and worthy of his character and standing whose name it bears; that it is marked off by so strong a line of distinction from the writings and Epistles which have not attained a place in the canon; all these are considerations which, though they do not in this, any more than in other cases, amount to demonstration, yet furnish when combined a proof hardly to be resisted, that the place where we do now find it in the New Testament canon is that which it ought to have, and which God in His providence has guided His church to assign to it."--Dean Alford, Prolegomena.

When Was It Written

James lived and labored in Jerusalem. There is no likelihood that he ever left the city of his fathers, hence we cannot doubt that the Epistle was written by him in Jerusalem and sent forth from there. As to the exact date scholars have been divided on that. That it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, and not after, is obvious, for James died before the city was taken by the Romans. But does not the Epistle of James refer to Paul's teachings in Romans as to righteousness by faith, and therefore, it is argued, James must have written the Epistle after Romans, and perhaps also Hebrews, had been written. But the argument is weak. James did not answer Paul's teaching at all; he was guided by the Spirit of God to emphasize a holy life, as a justification of real faith before man. That he cites Abraham, as Paul did in Romans, is no evidence that he had the Epistle to the Romans in his possession. "It is much more probable, that

all which James saith respecting works of faith has respect to a former and different state and period of the controversy, when the Jewish Pharisaic notions (as to the boast in the law) were being carried into the adopted belief in Christianity, and the danger was not, as afterwards, of a Jewish law-righteousness being set up, antagonistic to the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ, but of a Jewish reliance on exclusive purity of faith superseding the necessity of a holy life, which is inseparably bound up with any worthy holding of the Christian faith." Some of the most painstaking scholars, like Drs. Neander and Schaff have assigned to the Epistle a very early date. The absence of any mention of the decision at the church council (Acts 15) in the Epistle strengthens the early date. The date must be put around the year 45 A.D. and this makes the Epistle perhaps the earliest of the New Testament writings. Why should it not be so, considering that the Judaistic church in Jerusalem was the beginning of Christianity and the message of the Epistle harmonizes so fully with the character of that church?

The Twelve Tribes Scattered Abroad

As already stated James addressed the Epistle "to the twelve tribes scattered abroad." We hear much in our days about "the ten lost tribes." But were they lost when James wrote his Epistle? If they were lost how could he have addressed this Epistle to them? But further-more he addresses also those among the twelve tribes who were believers, so that it is but logical to assume that the twelve tribes, perhaps remnants of them, were known in the days of James, and that a number of each of the tribes had accepted Christ, the Messiah. Of course, like so much else, the term "twelve tribes" has been spiritualized as if it meant "the real Israel of God," that is, all believers, Jews and Gentiles. But this cannot be done. The fact that the literal tribes of Israel are addressed has been recognized by most expositors. James as the head of the Jerusalem church came in touch with many Israelites, who, according to their age-long custom, came up to Jerusalem to the feasts. Perhaps many of these visitors becoming acquainted with James and their believing brethren were also convinced that Jesus was the promised Messiah and believed on Him. They went back to their different communities in Central Asia and beyond, in the dispersion, and formed their synagogues. Later James learned from them the spiritual conditions in these different centers in the dispersion and addressed this Epistle to them as well as to those who were not believers.

We must also remember that a similar Jewish-Christian remnant will be in existence once more in Palestine during the coming great tribulation; it is the godly remnant, which we have pointed out many times in the prophetic books and in the Psalms. Then the gospel of the kingdom will again be preached, and as it was in the Jewish beginning of the age, signs and miracles will follow, in healing (James 5:14) and otherwise. The Epistle of James will then have a special meaning for this remnant.

Is the Epistle of James for us?

The Jewish character of this Epistle has lead some to say "it is for the Jews and not for us." We have known believers who refuse to read this Epistle. But that is a serious and deplorable mistake. Here are written great and needed truths which are as needful for us as they were for those to whom the Epistle was originally addressed. The Christian who passes by the Epistle of James rejects a most important part of the Word of God and as a result he will suffer loss. We quote from another: "I am persuaded

that no man, I will not say despises, but even attempts to dispense with the Epistle of James except to his own exceeding loss. Luther would have been none the worse, but all the stronger, for a real understanding of this writing of James. He needed it in many ways; and so do we. It is, therefore, a miserable cheat that any should allow their own subjective thoughts to govern them in giving up this or any portion of the Word of God; for all have an important place, each for its own object. Is it too much to ask that a document be judged by its express and manifest design? Surely we are not to take Paul's object in order to interpret James. What can be conceived more contrary, I will not say to reverence for what claims to be inspired, but even to all sense and discrimination, than such a thought? And it is thus that men have stumbled and fallen over this--it is little to say--precious and profitable, and above all, practically profitable position of the Word of God.

"At the same time we must read it as it is, or rather as God wrote it; and God has addressed it, beyond controversy, not merely to Christian Jews, nor even to Jews, but to the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad. Thus it embraces such of them as were Christians; and it gives a very true and just place to those who had the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. Only it is a mistake to suppose that it contemplates nobody else. People may come to it with the thought that all the Epistles were addressed to Christians, but this is simply wrong. If you bring this or any other preconception to the Word of God, no wonder His Word leaves you outside its divine and holy scope. For He is ever about us, and infinitely wise. Our business is to gather what He has to teach us. No wonder, therefore, when persons approach the Scripture with preconceived thoughts, hoping to find confirmation there instead of gathering God's mind from what He has revealed--no wonder that they find disappointment. The mischief is in themselves and not in the divine Word. Let us prayer fully seek to avoid the snare" (William Kelly).

The exhortations in this Epistle are, therefore, of great value; and there are many precious gems to be found scattered throughout the Epistle of James, the brother of the Lord.

The Division of the Epistle of James

We have already pointed out that this Epistle is not a doctrinal document. Addressed as it is to the twelve tribes in the dispersion it has nothing to say about Gentile believers, nor about their place in the Church, the body of Christ. They were believers, yet distinctly Jewish believers. This is seen in the opening verse in which James calls himself "the servant of God," an Old Testament expression; but he adds "of the Lord Jesus Christ." He and those to whom he wrote were serving God, still zealous for the law, adhering to it in every way, yet they believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and served Him. Their national hope as the people of God was theirs still. The Epistle is taken up entirely with the difficulties these Jewish believers had; it refers to the trials (like Peter's first Epistle) they were undergoing, exhorts them to faith. It points out the serious errors in the lives as believers; while they believed their lives did not correspond with such a belief. The correction of the faults, while common to all believers, has a striking Jewish aspect. They had respect of persons, looked to outward circumstances, and they are reminded of the royal law of the Scriptures, and insistence is made that their faith in the Messiah must be evidenced by works. They are exhorted to be more than mere hearers of the Word, by which they had been begotten anew, but to be doers of it. Many of them evidently wanted to be teachers, had great ambitions,

but their Jewish character, looseness of their tongues in speaking evil, had become prominent and that is corrected. There is a repeated reference in the Epistle to the godly of their nation, to Abraham and Isaac, to Rahab, Job and Elijah. There is also quite a little which links with the Sermon on the Mount. Finally there are exhortations to godliness, prayer, the life of trust and a reminder of the coming of the Lord. The prominent word seems to be the word "patience." We find it five times. The trying of faith is to work patience (1:3); patience is to have her perfect work (1:4); they are to be patient unto the coming of the Lord (5:7); and be like the husbandman who waits in patience, and finally they are reminded of the patience of Job. The exhortations may be grouped around this word patience. I. Exhortations to Patience in Suffering God's Will (1:1-18). II. Exhortation to Patience in Doing God's Will (1:19; 4:17). III. Exhortation to Patience in Awaiting God's Will (5:1-20). We shall follow in our analysis and annotations the chapter division as we have them in our Bibles.

- I. TRIALS AND THE EXERCISE OF FAITH (1)
- II. THE ROYAL LAW: FAITH AND WORKS (2)
- III. THE EVILS OF THE TONGUE CORRECTED (3)
- IV. FURTHER EXHORTATIONS TO RIGHT LIVING (4)
- V. THE COMING OF THE LORD AND THE LIFE OF FAITH (5)

Analysis and Annotations

I. TRIALS AND THE EXERCISE OF FAITH

CHAPTER 1

- 1. Trials and the power of faith (1:1-4)
- 2. The resources of faith (1:5-8)
- 3. The realization of faith (1:9-11)
- 4. The conquest of faith (1:12-15)
- 5. The result of faith (1:16-27)

Verses 1-4. The first verse is the introduction. The writer is James, but he does not add, as he might have done, "the brother of the Lord." It would have identified his person at once, and being the Lord's brother, he had a perfect right to call himself thus. But he did not. His humility shines forth in this omission; others called him by that title, but he avoided it. He is "servant of God," and he served God as "servant of the Lord Jesus Christ," a godly believing Jew. He writes to the twelve tribes in the dispersion of like faith. But the beautiful words of greeting in other Epistles, "Grace and peace be unto you," are not used by him. Greetings only are sent, and in this respect it is like the Apostolic document which was issued by the council in Jerusalem in Acts 15. (See Acts 15:23.)

The practical character of his letter is at once apparent. "Count it all joy when you fall in divers temptations." They were all undergoing trials and tests as believing Jews, who had accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The First Epistle of Peter, which is also addressed to believing Hebrews tells the same story. They were in heaviness through manifold temptations. Their faith was severely tried as with fire (1 Peter 1:6-7). James exhorts these sufferers not to be grieved or disturbed over these trials, but rather to count it a joy. These trials were the evidences

of their sonship and that their faith was real. Faith must be tried; the trial itself worketh patience, that is, endurance. This belongs to the practical experience of a believer. "For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21). If endurance has its perfect work, if the believer continues steadfast and in patience he will be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. The word "perfect" has been misinterpreted by some as if it meant an assumed Christian perfection or sinlessness. It does not mean that, but it means the perfect work of patience, enduring to the end, when self will is subdued and the will of God is fully accepted. The result is that there is no deficiency in the practical life of the believer. The Lord Jesus is an example of it. He never did His own will, but patiently waited for the will of God and yielded a perfect obedience. Faith is power to suffer and to endure trials and testings.

Verses 5-8. Such endurance is impossible without prayer. In the midst of trials and hardships, the various perplexities which come upon the believer, they, as well as we, lack wisdom; we often do not know what to do. Wisdom is needed, not human wisdom, but that wisdom which is from above. This wisdom enables us to discern His will and to follow the right guidance. It is obtained by an utter dependence on God, and the expression of that dependence is prayer. He giveth to all liberally, nor does He upbraid. We can come to Him at all times, and habitually wait on Him for guidance and direction; and as we wait on Him thus and count on Him there will be no disappointment. Often believers think they have divine guidance, but it is but following some kind of an impression, certain impulses, which may come from ourselves, or from the enemy. But constant waiting on the Lord and trusting in Him, this is wisdom. All this necessitates childlike faith, which means counting on His faithfulness and on an answer from Him. If we doubt His faithfulness or question His answer we cannot receive anything from Him. Hesitance about God, a double-mindedness, depending upon something else besides God is in reality unbelief. "For he that wavereth (is not positive in his utter confidence and dependence) is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." If the believer is double-minded, looking to the Lord and at the same time looking elsewhere, he dishonors Him, and He cannot honor the believer and answer his prayer. How blessedly it was expressed by David, which perhaps was remembered by these believing Jews, when the inspired king wrote: "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him" (Psalm 62:5).

Verses 9-11. Faith makes things real. It lifts above the circumstances of life. The brother of low degree in the midst of his trials can glory in realizing faith that he is exalted, while the rich believer can rejoice in faith in his trials, that he is made low, that he can suffer loss, and learn from his own poverty and lowness, realizing that all his riches are but for a moment, transitory "because as the flower of the grass he will pass away." This is the realization of faith in the believer; the believer of low degree in the midst of trials realizes that he is exalted, he glories in that, while the rich learns his low estate, that riches will fade away, but that he possesses an inheritance that fadeth not away.

Verses 12-15. Here is a beatitude: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." Overcoming faith will be rewarded. As the poor believer, or the rich believer, endures

temptation, is proved and overcomes through faith, the Lord will give to him the promised crown of life.

The sources of temptations are mentioned in connection with this beatitude. There are two sources of temptations. There are temptations, the trial of faith which comes from God for our own good; there is a temptation of the flesh, of inward evil, which is not of God, but of the devil. Trial of faith God permits, but when it comes to temptations of evil, to do evil, to be tempted in this fashion, God never is the author of that. God cannot be tempted with evil, nor tempteth He any man.

This passage settles the question with which so many believers are troubled: "Could the Lord Jesus Christ sin?" They generally quote in connection with this Hebrews 4:15, that He was tempted in all points as we are. They claim that "all points" includes temptation to sin coming from within. Even excellent Christians are at sea about this question. Our Lord Jesus Christ is very God. Being manifested in the flesh does not mean that He laid aside His Deity. James says, "God cannot be tempted with evil," for God is absolutely holy. Therefore our Lord could not be tempted with evil. He had nothing of fallen man in Him; the prince of this world (Satan) came and found nothing in Him. Furthermore, the correct translation of Hebrews 4:15 is as follows: But was in all points tempted like as we are, apart from sin. In all other points our blessed Lord was tempted, but never by indwelling sin, for He was absolutely holy in His human nature, given to Him by the Holy Spirit.

It is otherwise with man fallen, he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. The working, as revealed in verses 14-15, is illustrated in the case of David when lust brought forth sin and death (2 Sam. 11).

Verses 16-27. Evil has been traced to its source, and now we come to the other side. From God cometh every good and perfect gift and He is a God who does not change; with Him there is no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning. The greatest good and the greatest gift from such a God is the gift of His Only Begotten Son. Those who believe Him that sent the Son of God into the world (John 5:24) are born again by the Word of Truth (John 3:5; 1 Peter 1:23; Eph. 1:13) to be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. His own holy nature is thus communicated to those who believe; it is the result of faith. Of that new nature, the divine nature, it is written in 1 John 3:9: "He that is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." It means that there is no evil, in the new nature; it is a holy nature, it will never tempt to sin. But the believer has an old nature, and that is evil, nor can it ever be anything else, "for that which is born of the flesh is flesh." Thus, begotten again by His own good and gracious will, we are the first fruits of that new creation which in God's own time will be revealed.

This new nature must produce the fruits of righteousness, hence the practical exhortation. "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." Hearing is the attitude of true faith, ever listening to that which God speaks in His Word; then slow to speak, because speech gives expression to what we are; and it needs caution not to let the old nature express itself; and slow to wrath, which is the flesh. Wrath does not work that practical righteousness which is pleasing to God. Then

there is to be, as a result of true faith, a laying aside of all filthiness, all superfluity of naughtiness; this is the same putting off of which we read in the Pauline Epistles (Col. 3, etc). This putting off is not the working of the law, but it is the result of the implanted Word, which received in meekness, saves; it is both the means of true salvation and the working out of that salvation into results of righteousness. But it needs more than hearers of the Word; we must be doers of it.

"But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed indeed." What is the law of liberty? It is not the law of Moses as some have imagined. The perfect law of liberty is explained in the context. It is the Word of God by which the believer is begotten again, it is the implanted Word, which teaches, instructs, guides and directs; it is the life which flows from the new nature, subject to the Word of God. It has often been aptly described as a loving parent who tells his child that he must go here or there; that is, the very places which he knows perfectly the child would be gratified to visit. Such is the law of liberty; as if one said to the child: 'Now, my child, you must go and do such and such a thing,' all the while knowing you cannot confer a greater favor on the child. It has not at all the character of resisting the will of the child, but rather of directing his affection in the will of the object dearest to him. The child is regarded and led according to the love of the parent, who knows what the desire of the child is--a desire that has been, in virtue of a new nature, implanted by God Himself in the child. He has given him a life that loves His ways and His Word, that hates and revolts from evil, and is pained most of all by falling through unwatchfulness into sin, if it seemed ever so little. The law of liberty therefore consists not so much in a restraint of gratifying the old man, as in guiding and guarding the new; for the heart's delight is in what is good and holy and true; the Word of God on the one hand exercises us in cleaving to that which is the joy of the Christian's heart, and strengthens us in our detestation of all that we know to be offensive to the Lord" (Wm. Kelly).

This is the law of perfect liberty and in doing this there is blessedness. Then follows a definition of pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father. Religion does not mean here the inner life, but the outward manifestation of it. The fatherless and the widows are God's special objects of love and care; to visit such in their affliction is Christlike, How often this is quoted by those who do not believe in the gospel of grace and in the cross of Christ, as if works of kindness were the true religion, by which man is saved and pleasing to God. The whole chapter shows how erroneous such an application is. And the other definition "to keep himself unspotted from the world," a true life of self surrender and separation, is generally overlooked.

II. THE ROYAL LAW: FAITH AND WORKS

CHAPTER 2

1. The faith of Christ with respect to persons (2:1-5)
2. The royal law (2:6-13)
3. Faith must be manifested by works (2:14-26)

Verses 1-5. Here we have the synagogue mentioned, sufficient evidence that these Jewish believers were still gathering together in the Jewish

fashion, and were not an ecclesia, an assembly, gathered out. The Epistle to the Hebrews, written many years after the Epistle of James, exhorted them to leave the camp behind and go outside of it (Hebrews 13:13). Now in the synagogue among unbelieving Jews the rich man with his gold ring and fine clothing was accorded all honor, received the foremost place, while the poor man was told to stand up. (The same spirit prevails in many "churches" too, with their pew rents, sometimes auctioned off to the highest bidder, while the poor are not welcomed in such aristocratic surroundings.) Such a practice is not according to the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, who Himself became poor so that by His poverty we might be rich. Faith, so prominent in the opening chapter of this Epistle, is here again insisted upon. Their action, even, in so small a matter as preference of the rich and influential, was not according to that faith, which worketh by love. "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?"

Verses 6-13. They had despised the poor, who were believers and walked in faith, while the rich oppressed them and dragged them before the judgment-seats. These of course were not believers, but mere professors, which again shows the mixed conditions of their gatherings. Furthermore, these rich people with their shameful behavior had blasphemed "that worthy Name" by which they were called, the name of the Lord of glory. This respect of persons was a sin against the royal law: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" "If ye have respect to persons ye commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors." If it is the matter of keeping the law, it must be kept in every detail and the entire law "for whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." They were in their consciences still under the law, not having fully seen "the law of liberty" which is the perfect law, flowing as we have learned from the first chapter, from the new nature guided by the Holy Spirit, producing the walk in the Spirit, thus fulfilling the righteousness of the law. James, therefore, appeals to the Ten Commandments as a witness to arouse their consciences. Then he mentions once more the law of liberty. "So speak ye, and so do, as they that be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment shall be without mercy to him that hath shown no mercy. Mercy rejoiceth over judgment." The perfect law of liberty produces mercy in the believer, but where no mercy is shown, no mercy can be expected, but judgment. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2).

Verses 14-26. This section of the Epistle has produced much perplexity in the minds of some and led to a great deal of controversy. As it is well known, Dr. Martin Luther, thinking that James tried to answer and contradict Paul's statement in Romans, called James "an Epistle of straw." Others also hold that James corrects the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, the one being the inspired statement unfolding the gospel of grace, the other the defense of that gospel. But how could James answer either Epistle when they were not at all in existence, but written years later? When Paul wrote Romans and Galatians he knew James' Epistle. But did Paul try to correct James' argument? Not by any means. Both James and Paul wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Any thought of correcting a mistake impeaches the inerrancy of the Word of God.

There is no difficulty at all connected with this passage. The Holy Spirit through James shows that true faith which justifies before God must be evidenced by works. "What should it Profit, my brethren, though a man

say that he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save?" What kind of faith does he mean? It is a faith which assents to certain dogmas, consisting in a mental, intellectual assent, but it is not the living faith. A living faith manifests itself in works. That is what James insists upon. In their synagogue were those who professed to believe, but they did not show by their actions that they had the faith given by God; they only said that they had faith; works, as the proof of true faith were absent. "If a brother or a sister be naked (the fatherless and widows of the closing verse of the previous chapter), and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" The answer to this question is, it certainly profits nothing. Such a behavior shows that the professed faith is dead. "So also faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself" The quality of faith is defined in the nineteenth verse. "Thou believest there is one God"--that which the Jew boasts Of, that he believes in one God, and not like the heathen in many gods--"thou doest well; the demons also believe and tremble." Demons who also believe are still demons; so a man may believe and still be the natural man, live and act as such. The seal of true faith is works.

This the Holy Spirit now illustrates through the case of Abraham and Rahab, so different from each other, the one the Father of the faithful, the other the harlot of Jericho. The works of both bear witness to the character of true faith which produced them. In the case of Abraham he offered up his only son. Of Abraham it was said "he believed God." That he acted as he did, in unquestioning and unhesitating obedience, was the proof that he believed God. What he did was the seal put on his faith, by which he was justified before God. Rahab also believed, and her faith was demonstrated when she received the spies, hid them and associated herself with the people of God, while she separated herself from her own people. Thus faith was seen as a perfect faith, as the true faith, by works. This is what the Holy Spirit teaches through James. In Romans justification before God is taught, which is by faith only. James does not say that our works justify us before God; such are not needed before an omniscient God, for He sees the faith of the heart, which man does not see. It is in exercise with regard to Him, by trust in His Word, in Himself, by receiving His testimony in spite of everything within and without--this true faith God sees and knows. But when our fellow-men ask, show me, then that faith shows itself by works. It is our justification before man. The argument is concluded by the terse comparison: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

III. THE EVILS OF THE TONGUE CORRECTED

CHAPTER 3

1. The tongue and its work (3:1-12)
2. The wisdom which is earthly and the wisdom that is from above (3:13-18)

Verses 1-12. The practical character of this Epistle is still more evidenced by the contents of this chapter. The tongue is the member of the human body which is made prominent. The human tongue is a great and wonderful gift of the Creator; with which no other earthly creature is endowed. It is written: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." It therefore reveals the real 'condition of the heart and by

what it is governed.

The opening verse exhorts to caution as to teaching: "My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive a greater judgment." Here another Jewish characteristic is mentioned. They are naturally forward and love to be heard, taking leadership. It seems as if many wanted to be teachers and exercise public ministry. Perhaps this may refer to the "speaking in tongues" also, and the abuse of it as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:20-33. In the first chapter the exhortation was given "slow to speak"; here it is applied to teaching. The exhortation is interesting in its bearing. First, is the warning not to assume leadership in teaching for self-display; even teaching as given to the members of the body of Christ must be carefully exercised, for it carries with it great responsibility, for one may preach to others and be himself disapproved (1 Cor. 9:27). If one is a teacher he must also practice what he teaches, otherwise he shall receive a greater judgment, not as to salvation, but as to disapproval before the award seat of Christ.

in the second place, the exhortation shows that ministry among these Jewish Christians was in perfect liberty; they did not possess among themselves a special class in whom public teaching was vested. The next verse broadens and refers to speaking in general. The perfect man is he who does not offend in a word and therefore is able to govern the whole body. This introduces the tongue and its twofold possibility. "Behold we put bits in the horses mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature when it is set on fire by Gehenna." Horses, with their powerful bodies, are governed, led about and directed by the bit in their mouths; great ships which are driven about by gales and hurricanes, are steered by a small rudder, and so the human tongue is a little member which controls the whole man. It is like a tiny spark, yet that spark can set everything on fire and produce a disastrous conflagration. "Behold how much wood is kindled by how small a fire"--this is the correct rendering of the text. The tongue of the natural man, unrestrained by anything, is a fire. It defiles the whole body. Our Lord speaks of this. "That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:20-23).

The tongue is the medium to reveal all these evils of the heart, and by its use for evil becomes the seducer of others. It can set everything on fire, if it is set on fire by Gehenna, (translated, hell); when it is under the control of the author of sin.

"For every kind of beasts and birds, of creeping things and things in the sea, is tamed and hath been tamed of mankind; but the tongue can no man tame; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we the Lord and Father, and therewith curse we men, made after the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth the fountain send forth out of the

same opening sweet and bitter? Can a fig-tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a vine figs? Neither can salt water yield sweet."

James vehemently attacks this evil, yet in the spirit of love, as seen by the repeated address, "My brethren." Sins of the tongue are especially prominent among Jews; evil speaking, backbiting and lying, so frequently mentioned in their own Scriptures. He speaks of the power man has to tame every kind of beasts and birds, even the creeping things, as serpents and things in the sea; but man, the conqueror of the brute creation, is helpless when it comes to the taming of the tongue; the tongue can no man tame. David knew of this, for he wrote: "I said, I will take heed of my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me" (Psa. 39:1). All resolutions man makes to keep his tongue in subjection are unsuccessful. But if man has a new nature with the Holy Spirit dwelling there, the tongue can be governed and its evils overcome. Yet what sin is more frequently found among God's people than the sins of the tongue? It needs a constant watching and words must be weighed. Idle words, words which are not according to truth, or which reflect upon the character of another child of God, insinuating evil, magnifying faults, or words which belittle, words of envy and strife are the sins of the tongue prevalent among God's people. How well then to consider constantly the exhortation of the first chapter of this Epistle: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (1:19). The tongue is a restless evil; it is unceasingly at it and carries in its sinful use deadly poison.

Blessing and curse may be expressed by the tongue. While on the one hand, the tongue is an instrument of evil and for evil, the tongue of the believer, on the other hand, should be an instrument of righteousness and for the glory of God. What greater occupation on earth is possible than true worship in Spirit and truth! Through the tongue we can praise and exalt the Lord, bear testimony to that worthy Name, tell others of Him and become channels for eternal blessing. But how quickly, if uncontrolled, it may be used in the service of sin. Peter uttered with his tongue his great, God-given confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." But a short time after, that same tongue became the mouthpiece of Satan, when he rebuked the Lord for saying that He would go to Jerusalem to suffer and to die. What an inconsistency the tongue of man reveals! No such thing is found in nature anywhere. A tree does not produce two kinds of fruit; a fig tree bears no Olives; a vine does not produce figs; nor does the same fountain gush forth salt water and sweet water.

Verses 13-18. "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him shew out of a good behavior his works in meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envying and strife in your heart, boast not and lie not against the truth. This is not the wisdom which cometh down from above, but it is earthly, sensual, demoniacal. For where envying and strife is, there is disorder and every evil thing." This exhortation, also, is suited to the Jewish believers to whom it was originally addressed. They are noted still for their jealousies, their strife and self-exaltation, these fruits of the fallen nature of man, the works of the flesh; they are, of course, also found among Gentile believers. Envyings, the sectarian spirit, the party spirit, producing bitterness and contentions, these things are not the manifestations of the wisdom which is from above, the fruit of the new nature and of the Spirit, but it is the earthly wisdom, springing from the natural man, behind which stands the author of sin.

"But the wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without contention, without hypocrisy; and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace." This is the other side, the manifestation of the wisdom from above, the true fruits of the new nature and of the Spirit of God. It is first pure and then peaceable. It is pure, because it comes from God and leads to God. That which is from God cannot tolerate evil; it repudiates it. It aims at the glory of God and maintains His holy character. As a result it is peaceable, it seeks the fruits of peace among men, through the exercise of that love which the Holy Spirit describes in 1 Corinthians 13. It is gentle: "Let your gentleness be known to all men" (Phil. 4:5); it is easy to be entreated, ready to yield. It knows nothing of stubbornness, prejudice and opinionativeness, the sources of so much strife and contention among believers. When a man is conscious that his wisdom is of a superior kind, one can understand his unwillingness to have his mind or will disputed; but the truth is, that there is nothing which so marks the superiority of grace and truth and wisdom, that God gives, as patience, and the absence of anxiety to push what one knows is right and true. It is an inherent and sure sign of weakness somewhere, when a man is ever urgent in pressing the value of his own words and opinions, or caviling habitually at others. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, and produces peace.

IV. FURTHER EXHORTATIONS TO RIGHT LIVING

CHAPTER 4

1. Fightings and worldliness rebuked (4:1-6)
2. The Godly walk (4:7-17)

Verses 1-6. A strong rebuke follows the statements concerning the wisdom from beneath and the wisdom from above. It must be borne in mind that these exhortations are addressed to the twelve tribes scattered abroad; to say that these words mean believers only would be a serious mistake; while Christians are contemplated, those of the tribes of Israel who are not believers are equally in view. It applies therefore to those who were born of God, real believers, and to those who were not, an entirely different matter from the Pauline Epistles, which are exclusively addressed to the saints.

There was much strife and contention amongst them. Whence come wars and fightings? Certainly not from the wisdom which is above, which is first pure and then peaceable. But wars and fightings are the fruits of the old nature, the flesh. They come from the pleasures which war in the members. The gratification of the lusts of the natural man produces fightings and not the new nature, that which is from above; this includes all forms of lusts, not only those of the flesh, but the lust for power, the lust for preeminence and leadership, the lusts of the mind. "Ye lust and have not"; there is nothing that can satisfy the heart of man; any kind of lust will end in disappointment and remorse. "Ye kill and covet and cannot obtain." This is the way of the world in sin and away from God; it shows that James speaks to the unbelieving of the twelve tribes, and pictures their condition. "Ye fight and war. Ye have not because ye ask not. Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it in your pleasures." The natural man is also religious and as such prays. But their prayers sprang from the old nature, the desires of the flesh; they received

not because they asked amiss. They prayed for selfish things, incited by selfish motives, so that they might gratify their sinful natures. Even true believers often ask and receive not, because they ask amiss, out of selfish reasons, to minister to their own pleasures and gratification. If the Lord would answer such prayers He would minister to that which is evil.

The world and its unsatisfying pleasures controlled those described in the foregoing words, some of whom may have been professing believers. The wisdom which is earthly, sensual and demoniac, they followed. And now the writer breaks out in a passionate exclamation: "Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore would be the friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God." Here others than unbelievers are contemplated. The sphere of the natural man is the world; his walk is according to the course of this world; he is governed by the lust of the flesh, the lust of eyes and the pride of life. As such he is an enemy of God by wicked works and by nature a child of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3).

The true believer, saved by grace, is not of the world, even as our Lord was not of the world (John 17:16). Grace has severed the believer from the world; the cross of Christ has made him dead to the world and the world dead unto him. Hence the exhortation in John's Epistle "Love not the world, neither the things of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15-16). And believers may turn back to the world, like Demas, and love it for a time. James calls such adulteresses; they leave Him to whom they are espoused, even Christ, and turn to another. The term must have reminded the Israelites of the Old Testament passages in which unfaithful, apostate Israel is pictured as an adulteress and playing the harlot (Jeremiah 3:9; Ezekiel 16:23; Hosea 2). It is a solemn exhortation which every true believer should consider carefully; friendship with the world means enmity against God. Verse 5 should be rendered as follows: "Or think ye that the Scripture speaketh in vain? Doth the Spirit, who dwelleth in us, long unto envying?" All the Scriptures testify that worldliness and godliness cannot exist together; think ye then that these Scriptures speak in vain? And the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the believer, does not lust unto envy, for He opposes the flesh and those who walk in the Spirit do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. But he giveth more grace, yea grace sufficient to overcome by faith the world, for faith is the victory that overcomes the world. He quotes Proverbs 3:34. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Verses 7-17. Exhortations to a godly, holy walk follow. Submit yourselves, therefore to God; be subject unto Him, have no friendship with the world, but be His friend. There is one who would drag the believer back into the world, as Pharaoh tried to get Israel back to Egypt. Guard against it by resisting the devil and he will flee from you. This is a blessed promise which all His faithful people have tested at all times. We are not to flee from the devil, but to resist him as we do so in the name of our Lord, the enemy will be helpless and flee from us. Another blessed exhortation follows. "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you." Next James addresses again those who had not yet fully turned to the Lord. It is a call to repentance. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall exalt you."

The attitude towards other brethren is made clear in verses 11 and 12: "Speak not one against another, brethren." Speaking evil, the sin of the tongue is once more mentioned by James. There are seven verses in which exhortations to guard the tongue and speech are given: 1:19, 26, 2:12, 3:9, 16, 4:11 and 5:9. It seems that this must have been the besetting sin of these believing Jews. Evil, of course, must always be judged, whether it is unsound doctrine or an evil conduct; this belongs to the responsibility of a believer. But God alone, the Righteous judge, knows the heart and its motives. Speaking against a brother and judging him, that is, pronouncing a sentence of condemnation upon him, is the same as speaking against the law and judging the law. But if one judges the law, the same is not a doer of the law, but a judge; doing this we take the place of Him who is both, the lawgiver and the judge, that is the Lord.

The final paragraph urges dependence on the Lord and warns against making plans for the future without looking to the Lord and His will concerning His people. "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and buy and sell, and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow." Such a language shows self-will, forgetfulness of God, and self-confidence. It is planning with God left out. No one knows what the morrow may bring forth; but God knows. "For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will and we live, we will also do this or that."

The child of God who walks in godly fear, trusting the Lord, planning as under Him, will constantly remember that all depends on the Lord and on His will. It is a wholesome habit to add always, when we speak of the future, "if the Lord will and we live"; this is pleasing in His sight and a testimony of our submission to Him and dependence on Him. Otherwise it is the boasting, vain-gloriousness of the self-secure world, which boasts and plans, without thinking of God and His will. The last verse must not be detached from what goes on before. "To him, therefore, that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Sin does not consist only in doing evil, but if we do not the good we know, it is also sin. If we do not act according to the fact that we are entirely dependent on God as to the future, we sin.

"This verse should forever settle the question of sinless perfection for a Christian: 'To him who knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' This is much more, of course, than the prohibition of positive evil. There is a negative evil which we have carefully to keep before us. The responsibility of knowing what it is good to do is one that, while we may in a general way allow it, yet deserves far deeper consideration than we often would even desire to give it. How solemn it is to think of all the good that we might do, and yet have not done! How slow we are to recognize that this, too, is sin! We are so apt to claim for ourselves a kind of freedom here which is not Scriptural freedom; and there is no doubt, also, that we may abuse a text like this to legality, if there be legality in our hearts. We are to be drawn, not driven. Yet the neglect of that which is in our hand to do--which we, perhaps, do not realize our capacity for, and that only through a spirit of self-indulgence or a timidity which is not far removed from this--such neglect, how hard it is to free ourselves of it, and how much do we miss in this way of that which would be fruitful in blessing for ourselves as well as for others! for, indeed, we can never sow fruit of this kind without reaping what we have sown; and the good that we

can do to others, even if it requires the most thorough self-sacrifice, yet will be found in the end to have yielded more than it cost, and to have wrought in the interests of him who has not considered even or sought this" (Numerical Bible).

V. THE COMING OF THE LORD AND THE LIFE OF FAITH

CHAPTER 5

1. The oppression by the rich and their coming doom (5:1-6)
2. Be patient unto the coming of the Lord (5:7-12)
3. The prayers of faith and the life of faith (5:13-20)

Verses 1-6. The two classes whom James addresses stand out very prominently in this final chapter of his Epistle. The rich oppressors certainly are not believers but the unbelieving rich; they are not addressed as "brethren"; but others are in verse 7 and exhorted to patience. Both classes, the unbelieving rich and the believing remnant are confronted by the coming of the Lord. "Go to now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh as fire. Ye have heaped together treasures in the last days."

The present age, which began with the death and resurrection of our Lord, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, is spoken of as "the last days" and "the last time" (Heb. 1:2 and 1 John 2:18); this age will be followed by the dispensation of the fullness of times, the times of restoration as promised by God's holy prophets (Eph. 1:10; Acts 3:19-21), the age of the kingdom when Christ reigns and His saints with Him. And this present age will end with the coming of the Lord to execute judgment, to right all wrong and judge all unrighteousness. These rich Israelites heaped treasures together, and, as we shall see later, acted outrageously, thereby showing that they did not believe in the day of the Lord, when He will be manifested in judgment glory. Yet their own Scriptures announced exactly that which James here states. See Isaiah 2:10-20 and especially Zephaniah 1:14-18. In anticipation of that coming day he calls on them to weep and howl, and announces the fate of their treasures.

Let us remember that the Epistle was written years before the destruction of Jerusalem. When Jerusalem fell, and even before its fall, many of the rich Jews became paupers; they were ruined, tortured and murdered, as Josephus tells us. The fall of Jerusalem with its awful horrors, in the year 70 A.D., was a judgment of the Lord, but not the day of the Lord and the coming of the Lord. What happened then to the stubborn unbelieving masses will happen again, only on a larger scale during the coming great tribulation and when the Lord returns in power and in great glory. We believe therefore, that this exhortation to the rich has a special bearing for the future, during the very end of the age.

But they were oppressing the poor as well. "Behold, the hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth out; and the cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have lived delicately on the earth, and taken your pleasure; ye have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned, ye have killed the just One; he doth not resist you." Oppression

of the poor, yea, the poor of their own people is another characteristic of the Jewish people. The prophet Amos rebuked it in his day, when the poor were downtrodden and robbed by the rich. It is so today and will be so in the future. And the money which was taken from the poor was used by the rich to live in luxury and wanton pleasures. The spirit they manifested in heaping treasures together, oppressing the poor and needy, robbing them, and living in pleasure, is the same which condemned and killed the Just One, the Lord Jesus Christ, who did not resist. To apply these words primarily and altogether to our Lord can hardly be done. What was done to the Lord of glory these unbelievers did to His true followers. It will be so again during the great tribulation, under Antichrist, when the godly remnant will be persecuted by those who side with the false Messiah. See Psalm 79:1-3; Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:9-25; Revelation 11, 12 and 13.

Verses 7-12. "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord is at hand." He addresses in these words the believers, the suffering remnant amongst the unbelieving masses which attended the synagogue. They are to be patient and suffer in patience, without resisting. The coming of the Lord, which is mentioned twice in these verses, is His visible and glorious manifestation, the same which our Lord speaks of in Matthew 24:30-31. The first Epistle to the Thessalonians, which contains that unique revelation of the coming of the Lord for His saints, the resurrection of the holy dead and the sudden transformation of the living saints, to be caught up together in clouds to meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4:13-18) had not yet been given. The mystery "we shall not all sleep but be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinth. 15:51-52), was then unknown. And let us note here, that this is one of the mysteries nowhere made known in the Old Testament.

The coming of the Lord, we repeat, is that coming which is so many times announced in the Prophetic Word of the Scriptures. "The first generation of Christians expected to witness in the near future the personal reappearance of Christ on earth to close the old dispensation by punishing unbelievers, and delivering the Christians. These expectations were partly realized when the fall of Jerusalem closed the old Jewish dispensation by the destruction of the temple and the final cessation of the Levitical worship of Jehovah. At the same time misery and ruin befell the Jewish nation which had rejected and crucified our Lord. As regards any more exact fulfilment, the statements of the New Testament must be interpreted according to the principle laid down in 2 Peter 3:8 and 1 John 2:18." (This passage is from the New Century Bible. One is grateful to find this paragraph in a work which is more or less on the side of the destructive criticism.) That the destruction of Jerusalem and the judgment of the nation was predicted by our Lord is known to all, that the event when it came in the year 70 is the coming of the Lord, is not true.

James exhorts his suffering brethren to be like the husbandman who has to wait between the sowing time and the harvest. But here is another wrong interpretation. The latter rain of which James speaks has been foolishly interpreted as meaning a spiritual latter rain, another Pentecost. This is one of the star arguments of present day Pentecostalism with its supposed revival of apostolic gifts. The former and latter rain of which James speaks has no such meaning; it is purely the rainfall in nature. In Palestine there are two distinct rainy seasons, one in the spring, the other in the fall. (See Deut. 11:14.)

Then follow other words of encouragement. "Murmur not, brethren, one against the other, that ye be not judged; behold the judge standeth before the door." Among themselves they were to guard against any friction and fretfulness, always remembering Him who is the judge, and who standeth before the door. They were also to remember the examples in suffering and patience of the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, the patience of Job, and how blessedly his suffering ended through the pity and mercy of the Lord. There is a warning also against oath making, such a common thing amongst the Jews. (See our Lord's warning in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:33-37).

Verses 13-20. The Epistle closes with practical exhortations to prayer and the exercise of faith. "Is any among you suffering? Let him pray." A short but weighty instruction. Instead of murmuring, as their forefathers did, instead of complaining in suffering, prayer must be exercised. The godly in Israel always made prayer their refuge and especially are the Psalms rich in this direction. "Is any cheerful? Let him sing psalms." The Psalms were used extensively in the synagogue. To teach upon this statement, as had been done, that the church should sing nothing but the Psalms, and reject the great hymns of the saints of God of all ages, born often in adversity and in deep soul exercise, is far fetched. Much in the Psalms does not express true Christianity at all. "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the assembly; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." This exhortation demands a closer scrutiny and examination. Of late this instruction by James has been greatly misapplied by faith-healers. There are many extremists who teach that here is a commandment to the church how sickness among the saints should be dealt with; that means, to alleviate bodily ills, must be fully discarded and if they are used, it is unbelief in the power of God and a hindrance to faith.

There are men and women all over Christendom, who go about with a message of healing of diseases, who anoint the sick by the hundreds and thousands, claiming that this is the only way that illness is to be treated. Then these same healers claim miraculous cures which are, after careful investigation, mostly found to be falsehoods. Some of these advocates of this method of healing, denouncing means and the use of physicians, were taken sick and had to use means to overcome their bodily ills. The entire subject of "faith-healing" we cannot examine here; nor can we enlarge upon the claims of "Christian Science" and other metaphysical cults and systems. Supernatural healing of diseases is claimed by Romish Catholicism, by the shrines and holy places of the Greek Orthodox church, by Spiritism, Mormonism and in many pagan systems. We confine our remarks to the passage before us.

It has been explained by some that the words of James mean that which should be done in case sickness unto death has seized upon a believer. It is then interpreted to mean "Prayer shall save the dying man from the punishment of his sins; and after his death, the Lord will raise him up in resurrection." This view we reject. No prayer of faith is needed for the coming physical resurrection of a believer. Romanism has made out of it "the sacrament of extreme unction" which is another invention.

inasmuch as "the anointing with oil" seems to be the point most stressed by divine healers, we shall examine this first. What does it mean? Here we must remember the Jewish character of the Epistle. We have shown before that the believers who in James addresses were still closely identified with Judaism, hence they practised many things peculiar to Judaism. Anointing with oil was extensively used in the ceremonies of the Jews. Kings and priests were anointed, oil being liberally poured upon the head, denoting outwardly the fact of consecration to office, and symbolically the Spirit of God, which they needed for the exercise of their functions. Furthermore, oil was also very widely used for health and comfort. It was and is still a great remedial agent in the Orient.

The Good Samaritan poured into the wounds of the man who had fallen among the thieves oil and wine. Oil was used in cases of fever and most generally in skin diseases. Anointing the sick with oil was a general practice, as can be shown from talmudical literature. In Mark 6:13, we read, "And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." Would they not have been healed if they had not been anointed with oil? The anointing with oil was an old custom which the disciples made use of, but the Lord in commissioning them in connection with the kingdom message did not tell them that they should anoint the sick with oil; they did it, for such was the universal practice. If James commands these Jewish believers who were sick to be anointed with oil he reaffirmed therefore this old Jewish custom. Oil is something beneficial to the body, a remedy, just as wine is recommended by the Spirit of God as a remedy for the ills of the body (1 Timothy 5:23). It is therefore an open question whether oil may not stand here also for legitimate means to be used in case of illness. Divine healers carry with them a small bottle of oil and daub the forehead with a drop of oil, but this is not the anointing commanded here. Where is the authority to say that a drop of oil must be put on the forehead?

But it is very striking that apart from this passage, in this transition Epistle, nowhere else in the New Testament (except in Mark 6:13), do we read anything about this anointing with oil in case of sickness. Why did not Paul write to Timothy, who often had infirmities, "Call the elders, let them anoint you with oil," but instead of it, the divinely given remedy, "a little wine," is urged upon him. And Paul was sick himself, suffered with his eyes, which probably was the thorn in the flesh. Trophimus was sick in Miletus. But nowhere this Jewish ceremony, anointing with oil, is mentioned. The Epistles which are the high water mark of divine revelation, are the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians; we find nothing in these Epistles about healing of diseases by anointing and prayer. Nor is it mentioned in any of the other Pauline Epistles. In Corinthians the gift of healing is found among the gifts of the Spirit, but he who possessed that gift had no need of using oil besides. Our conclusion, then, is that the anointing with oil in this passage is something customary with the Jews, which is not meant to be perpetuated in the Church, for if such were the fact the Holy Spirit would have stated it elsewhere.

We pass over the question as to true elders, which are to be called. Many of those who go about as divine healers are women. Who has ever heard of "women elders"? In fact, in the public healing services which have become such a common thing in our days, the question of elders is entirely ignored. Big advertisements appear in the papers that services for the

healing of the sick are to be held. As a result hundreds come and are ready to do anything, to believe anything, if only some hope is held out that they might be cured. They readily submit to the ceremony of having a little oil put on their foreheads, but the command, that the sick person, is to call for the elders of the church, those of authority, is ignored. The question is, "Do we still have the elders in the apostolic sense?" These are matters which are completely set aside by modern faith healers.

But the emphasis in the passage is on "the prayer of faith." The prayer of faith, not the anointing with oil, shall save the sick. No believer denies the efficacy of believing prayer, yet always guarded by the condition of "if it be His will." In case of sickness the child of God will not send for a physician in the first place, but the believer turns to the Lord and puts himself in His gracious and merciful hands. The passage here seems to be the matter of sickness as a chastening from the Lord on account of specific sins committed. In such a case when self-judgment has brought the matter into His light, the promise can be claimed "the prayer of faith shall save the sick."

"Was it intended to be a direction universally applicable to all cases, and to be carried out at all times, in all places, and under all conditions? Surely--most surely not. For note that there is no question at all as to the result: 'the prayer of faith shall save (it is certain) the sick and the Lord will raise him up.'

"Now, we know perfectly well that this is not and cannot be the invariable outcome of all sickness. The vast majority of mankind--yes, of Christians--has died as the result of some sickness: has this been because 'elders' have not been called? Have they come to the end of that life here because they were not anointed with oil, and the prayer that always goes up from loving hearts was not the prayer of faith, and since not of faith, was sin? Who would not reject such conclusions with abhorrence? Yet are they inevitable, if this Scripture be pressed as being the one divinely given direction in the case of all sickness.

"In it every act, every movement, must be in faith: that is recognizing the Lord's hand in the sickness, and the Lord's mind in removing it. But where is the great and precious promise on which faith can always rest, that shall make healing sure? In one case only, and that is if the sickness does not come from constitutional weakness, as with Timothy, or the hardship of a Christian devotion as with Epaphroditus, or any other natural cause--but as a chastening of the Lord for some specific sins committed, and this confessed and put away, the chastening ceases.

"And this is naturally enough the point of view of such a writer as James. Freedom from sickness consequent on obedience was interwoven in the first covenant: 'And the Lord will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest upon thee; but will lay them upon all that hate thee'--is that what the Christian desires today: his diseases put on anyone else who may hate him? yet is that involved in that covenant.

"What, then, more natural than that this writer, who, although Christian, is still on the ground of a regenerate and sincerely pious Jew, should regard sickness in a light that is common to both Christian and Jew--as a chastening for sin."--(F.C. Jennings, Our Hope.)

With this we leave this portion of the Epistle, which has led to so much misunderstanding. To help the reader in getting the true conception we add in a brief appendix, at the close of these annotations, the comment as it is given in the Numerical Bible.

"Confess, therefore, your sins one to another, that ye may be healed." This brings out fully the fact that the sickness in view is on account of specific sins. When the sins are confessed and judged, grace intervenes, and God in mercy heals. Rome builds upon this passage the miserable invention of the confessional. But it does not mean confession to a man-made "priest," but a simple confiding of believers among themselves.

The great value of prayer is next pointed out by James. "The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working"; this is a rendering adopted by many. He cites the case of Elijah. He was a man "of like passions with us" as we learn from the historical record of the Scriptures, which tells us of his great infirmities, as well as of his remarkable faith. He prayed fervently and rain was withheld, he prayed again and God answered his faith. The God of Elijah is our God still, who delights to answer the fervent prayer of the righteous man; the power of prayer can never be separated from the character of him who prays.

"My brethren, if any among you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins." With this the Epistle ends abruptly. Faith must be manifested by love towards those who err. The exhortation finds an application in a general way, but primarily to those who know the truth and have backslidden. This is learned from the words "if any among you"; the application in a general way is also fully warranted. The ending without greeting has led some critics to assume, that the Epistle is made up of passages from sermons, compiled quite late, by a man by the name of James. The internal as well as the historical evidences refute this assumption.

APPENDIX

James 5:14-16

By F.W. Grant

The anointing with oil in the name of the Lord seems to be the claim of an authority which those of whom we are speaking would be the last to assert. No doubt the emphasis is laid here upon the "prayer of faith," to save the sick, and the prayer of faith certainly should not be lacking with us. We need not doubt how much we should gain if there were a more simple and constant reference to the Lord in these matters, and we cannot but remember the example of old of one who sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians, and died. The use of means that are in our hand may easily be perverted to the slighting of this way of faith; and it would certainly be far better to leave out the means in any case rather than to leave out the Lord. The distinct and united acknowledgment of our dependence upon Him in all these cases is due from us, and we suffer loss if God is not acknowledged; but then for this, no elders or anointing can be needed, and the prescription of these things makes it evident that something more is contemplated here than simply the prayer of faith. Even so, there is no

prohibition of means, if there be no prescription of them; and in God's ordinary way of working He certainly works by them. He could sustain us at any time without food, but we do not ordinarily expect Him to do this, although the food may profit nothing except the Lord please to use it. We cannot but remember in this way the prescription of a little wine to Timothy, while at the same time he was in the very midst of an assembly which had its regularly appointed elders.

In Judaism let us remember how, at the beginning of it, God was pleased to act miraculously in a marked way; and in the beginning of Christianity in Jerusalem, we find the same signs and miracles accompanying the Word. This was a most suited testimony to the new doctrine being published, a testimony which was also recognized in our Lord's case by the Jews as that which was to establish a new doctrine (Mark 1:27). The waning of all miraculous powers when once the testimony was established is marked, and cannot be denied. People may impute it, as they do impute it, to a lack of faith on the part of Christians; but with regard to such things one might certainly expect faith to be manifested as much as in other things. In fact, they would be things most earnestly clung to, for the manifest benefit and the display of power in them.

On the other hand, the prevalence of corruption which, whatever may be our own individual views of truth, cannot be but acknowledged, would naturally make it less suited that the Church so failing should still preserve her ornaments; but the reason for the decline of miracles is evidently other than this. In the history of the Acts we find an apparent absence of such things, where, for instance, as in Berea, men were employed with the Word itself to test the doctrine by it. Although in general, as the Lord promised, miraculous signs did follow at the beginning those who believed, yet even then this was never universally true. It could not be pleaded as the necessary mark of Christian faith. "Are all workers of miracles?" says the apostle; and the question in itself supposes a negative answer. Thus, if a whole assembly lacked, there was no necessary failure, and need be no disappointment in this case; while in Corinth their "coming behind in no gift" was no necessary evidence of a right state of soul. It seems even, one would say, a matter of course that God never meant our daily lives to be full of manifest miracles. He never meant to demonstrate the truth after that fashion. He would leave it, rather, to its own inherent and spiritual power.

Men easily crave miracles; but the whole generation in the wilderness, the constant witness of these, nevertheless perished for their unbelief. The miracles work no faith, although they might, and would, awaken attention to that which God presented as an object for faith; yet to those who believe in Christ, when they saw the miracles, He did not commit Himself (John 2:23-25). Every way it should be plain today that what goes for such amongst men commonly is no longer the mark upon true faith or the truth itself which calls for faith. The same things exactly can be wrought by those who deny Christian fundamentals as by those who profess them; and where is the evidence then? No set of men in the present day can be found who can adjust broken bones without surgery. If God wanted to show what He was doing, do we think that a broken bone would be a greater difficulty to Him than anything else?

Moreover, the signs and wonders of the time of the end are spoken of as rather giving evidence to falsity than to truth, to Antichrist than to Christ; and there will be signs and wonders wrought yet, which, as the Lord

has said, would deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect. Thus, then we can easily understand (and especially in such an Epistle as the present--an Epistle to that nation to whom God had testified by signs and wonders of old, and would repeat to them now, in evidence that Christ was in nothing behind Moses) how we should find a reference of this kind to powers which might connect themselves with the elders of the Christian assembly, and yet understand why James should leave us, as it were, at a loss how to apply these things to ourselves. We can never be wrong in believing that the prayer of faith is still really the power that will save the sick, let means be used or not used; but the use of means seems in general rather according to the Lord's mind than against it. His common way is to work through that which He has Himself ordained, and there are plainly herbs for the healing of men. The very presence of such powers is proof that the Lord has given them; and if He has given them, it is for us. Faith can acknowledge Him in these, as well as be perfectly happy in trusting Him apart from all consideration of these. The prohibition of them, if God designed it, would surely be furnished to us.

Moreover, God at no time intended that things should be left, as it were, absolutely in man's hands, even though it were the hand of faith, as the doctrines taught suppose. The prayer of faith may be that which saves the sick, and yet, after all, that be far from meaning that we can find in every case a faith which should do so. God has His own will and His own way; and while we can always reckon upon Him to answer the soul that looks to Him, yet the way of His answer we do not always know. The apostle prays that the thorn in the flesh might depart from him, but it did not depart. God turned it to greater blessing. That was an answer to the prayer, but it was not such an answer as men usually count as that. Could any one suppose that among Christians, if everything were absolutely right, the sick would always be raised up, that death would hardly obtain at all, except in the extremest old age? We may imagine any such fancies, but fancies they are, and nothing else. Yet it is plain there is an appeal to God advocated here which we are always right in making, and from which we may always expect an answer in the goodness of Him whom we address. More than this, the Lord may give distinct light as to His mind that will enable one, as to anything, to ask with assurance, without the possibility of denial. If we are near enough to God for this we have cause indeed to be thankful; but we had better be humble about it, and be very sure that we have it before we claim it.

[Return to Top](#)