

Chapter XVIII

ESTABLISH YOUR HEARTS

James's ministry, like our Lord's ministry in the sermon on the mount, allowed the possibility that there were some genuine believers among the Jews to whom he wrote. James had to allow that this possibility existed, because the Jews had been the custodians of the truth prior to the church age. It had been their responsibility to preach the gospel, through the shadows and types of the sacrificial system, until Christ made *one sacrifice for sin forever* (Hebrews 10:12).

The church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, was established to be the custodian of the truth throughout this age. It was given this authority by our Lord prior to His ascension into heaven (Matthew 28:18-20). Israel's authority to continue with the shadows and types of the sacrificial system was taken from her with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Even so, God has not forsaken the Jews. At the end of the church age, at the time of the first resurrection, Israel will be grafted back into the Olive tree. One hundred and forty-four thousand Jews will testify to the truth during the Great Tribulation period. Many will believe through their testimony and will be

Establish Your Hearts

put to death by the antichrist. A remnant (one-third of the nation) will flee into the wilderness until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, when *they shall look on Him whom they pierced* (John 19:37), *And so all Israel shall be saved...* (Romans 11:26).

James's manner of addressing his Jewish brethren has confused his expositors. Most of them have believed James wrote to saved Jews of the *diaspora*, even though this interpretation brings the book of James into direct conflict with the writings of the apostle Paul. This interpretation cannot stand, because it is in violation of the truth: *All scripture is given by inspiration of God*. Scripture must be interpreted in the light of Who God is. He cannot lie; therefore all Scripture, rightly divided, comes into perfect agreement. When it appears not to agree, it is because of human misunderstanding. Thus James continued:

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. (James 5:7-8, emphasis mine)

There is no hope for an unbeliever in the coming of the Lord. Nevertheless the Jews knew the coming of the Lord meant the kingdom would be established. The Jews also knew God had promised them the kingdom, despite all of their failures. Consequently James exhorted them to be patient unto that day.

This gave James another opportunity to present the gospel to his Jewish brethren. He exhorted the Jews to be like farmers: they were to plant their crops and patiently wait for the early rain. The early rain caused the crop to germinate and spring forth. The next step for them was to patiently wait for the latter rain. This rain would bring their crops to fruition, ready for harvest.

Establish Your Hearts

This description was indigenous to farming in Israel at the time of the writing of the book of James, because the Jews were not allowed to use systems of reservoirs and irrigation canals to irrigate their crops as they had done in Egypt:

For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: but the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: a land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.

And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. (Deuteronomy 11:10-14, emphasis mine)

There were seven feasts of the Jews that were associated with the early and latter rains.

The early rains were identified with the first three feasts, and the latter rains were identified with the last three feasts. There was one feast in between, Pentecost. The feasts on either side of Pentecost speak of the two advents of the Lord. The first three feasts were fulfilled by the Lord in His first advent, and the last three feasts will be fulfilled when He comes for His saints, and then returns seven years later to establish His Kingdom. Since Pentecost was between the first three feasts and the last three feasts, it speaks of the church age, the time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27). These feasts of the Jews may have been on James's mind when he wrote of the patience of the husbandman, waiting for the early and the latter rains to bring forth the coming of the Lord.

With regard to the early rain our Lord spoke to Nicodemus, a Jewish Rabbi, who came to Jesus by night. He flattered the Lord, as a teacher come from God because of the miracles He

Establish Your Hearts

worked, but the Lord ignored his flattery and said: *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again [born from above], he cannot see the kingdom of God* (John 3:3).

Nicodemus was baffled. How could a man be born when he is old? Could he enter into his mother's womb a second time and be born? How could these things be? Then our Lord spoke a parable to Nicodemus, which the translators missed because of the Greek word *pneuma*. *Pneuma* means *wind*. It can also mean *breath* or *spirit*, depending upon the context. In order for our Lord to have spoken of earthly things (which He later claimed He did with Nicodemus), the first and second use of the word *pneuma* (in John 3:5-7) should have been translated *wind*, and *hudatos* (the Greek word translated *water*) should have been translated *rain*.

Rain is an important part of the *earthly things* of which our Lord spoke. There can be no life on this earth without rain. The source of rain is from above. Thus the point of our Lord's parable about *earthly things* is that life (eternal life) has its source from above (in the One Who came from above). Thus our Lord actually told Nicodemus:

Except a man be born of [rain, *hudatos*] and of the [wind, *pneuma*], he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the [wind, *pneuma*] is spirit [*pneuma*]. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born from above [*anohen*]. (John 3:5-7)

Thus our Lord told Nicodemus flesh produces flesh (by natural birth) and the wind of His parable produces spirit (a spiritual birth). This is how one is born from above (by the Word of God and the Spirit of God); therefore Nicodemus needed to be born from above in order to see the kingdom of God. This perplexed Nicodemus, so that our Lord questioned:

Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell

Establish Your Hearts

you of heavenly things? (John 3:10b-12, emphasis mine)

The Lord's conversation with Nicodemus was concerned with spiritual things, but Nicodemus could only think in terms of natural things. Therefore our Lord used the natural to introduce the spiritual to Nicodemus so that he might be born from above.

The wind and the rain were the earthly things of which our Lord had spoken. They made up an earthly parable, which Nicodemus did not understand. How could the wind and the rain cause a man to be born from above? It was then that our Lord explained His parable:

If I have told you earthly things [the parable of the wind and rain], and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (John 3:12-21)

The first part of the parable had to do with the *wind*, which represented the work of the Spirit of God. The second part of the parable was related to the *rain*, both the early and the latter rains would be understood, for that was necessary to bring a crop to maturity in Israel. Man has no control over the wind or the rain. And no man can go up to heaven to bring the rains down in order to have a crop on earth. Neither can any man ascend to heaven to bring down the Son of God to effect a Spiritual crop upon this earth.

Establish Your Hearts

The *birth that is from above*, then, like the wind and the rain, is effected entirely by God. The manner in which it is effected was compared to the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness. Nicodemus, like any other Jew of that day, should have known the circumstances surrounding the lifting up of the serpent. He should have known that the serpent was lifted up because of the sin and rebellion of the nation of Israel against God.

As a consequence of Israel's rebellion, God sent a judgment of poisonous serpents into her midst. This judgment would have resulted in the deaths of all who were bitten, except for the intervention of Moses, who prayed for them. God provided a solution to the problem. He told Moses to make a serpent of brass and place it upon a pole. Moses was to lift the serpent up before the people with the promise that if they would look by faith to the lifted-up serpent, they would be saved from the consequences of the poison injected by the serpents. In the typology of Scripture the serpent represents sin, the brass represents judgment, the lifting up of the serpent represents crucifixion, and the pole (made from a tree) represents a curse. Therefore the lifted-up serpent represents the crucifixion of Jesus Christ to effect salvation.

Thus the Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven to bear the judgment of sin: *That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life* (John 3:15). Like those Jews who were bitten by the poisonous serpents, he that believed was not condemned, but he that did not believe was already condemned; because the only remedy for the serpent's poison was a look of faith, just as the solution to man's sinful condition is found in the judgment of his sins in Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary. It is an understanding of the lifted-up serpent in the wilderness that enables us to understand how *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that*

Establish Your Hearts

whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

The *early rain* represents the first advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. The life that our Lord lived in His first advent fulfilled all righteousness and every jot and tittle of the law. This fact, coupled with the fact that through the virgin birth He was a near Kinsman, qualified the Lord Jesus Christ to be our Kinsman Redeemer. In this capacity He willingly offered Himself as a ransom for sin, when the Jews and the Romans crucified Him on the cross of Calvary. He was then buried and arose again the third day from the dead, which provided the basis for His promise: *Because I live, ye shall live also*. Each of these prophetic fulfillments was an essential part of the gospel, which our Lord commanded should be preached in all of the world until the time of His second advent upon this earth, when He shall establish His Kingdom.

Thus the *latter rain* speaks of the second advent of the Lord, when our Lord Jesus Christ shall come to receive that which has been *born from above* as a consequence of the faithful preaching of the gospel. One day the trumpet shall sound, and our Lord shall come to gather His wheat (the redeemed) into the garner. This will be the harvest James spoke of. This will be the harvest the farmer was to patiently wait for, which was to come forth because of the early and the latter rains.

It would do a Jew no good to patiently wait for that harvest (at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth) if his heart was not *stablished*. The establishment of the heart was a genuine faith in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, as opposed to a vain faith placed in the traditions of the elders.

If the Jews had understood the significance of the early and the latter rains; if they had

Establish Your Hearts

understood the significance of the seven feasts of the Jews (Leviticus 23); then, perhaps, James's exhortation would have been unnecessary. They would have already been established in the truth of the saving grace of God by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, but they were not. So James charged the Jews of the *diaspora*:

Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not (Greek: *stenadzo*, to give vent to querulous or censorious feelings, moan, sigh) one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. (James 5:8-9)

The individual who wishes to try to establish his own righteousness by judging others should remember our Lord said, *With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you*. In other words, you shall be measured with the same measuring rule that you use to measure others. You will also be measured by the perfect Righteousness of God, which is Jesus Christ.

A genuine relationship with the Lord has to be built upon the promises of God. God is immutable, He cannot lie, His very nature is Truth and Love. Therefore if the Jew, or anyone else, wants to come into a right relationship with God, it has to be based upon what God has promised and not upon what man thinks. The Judge stands before the door to judge righteous judgment. Therefore James exhorted them, as well as all who will heed his exhortation, that they were to be established in the faith.

Sadly, there was a deep-seated tendency for the Jews to judge anyone who was less fortunate than themselves. This was apparent in the Jews' attack upon the man who had been born blind, but who had received his sight from the Lord. They considered his blind condition to have been the result of a grave sin. When he sought to give testimony to the Lord, they said, *Thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost thou teach us?*

Establish Your Hearts

James could have reminded the Jews that the entire nation of Israel had suffered at the hands of her various captors; but he chose, rather, to show that the prophets and righteous men, called and chosen of God and revered by the nation, had suffered many things. Thus he wrote:

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. (James 5:10-12)

The final trait of the Jews which James dealt with was the matter of entering into vows with God. The New Jewish Encyclopedia gives some insight into the present-day attitude of the Jews toward vows:

The Hebrew term *Neder* (pl. *Nedarim*) is applied to a voluntary obligation which one takes upon oneself in the form of an oath or vow. Laws concerning vows are recorded in the Bible and are treated in detail in a special tractate of the Talmud called Nedarim. There are two kinds of vows, affirmative and negative. The former is undertaken by a person as an obligation to do something voluntarily which is not prescribed by law. The latter is a person's resolution to abstain from something, or deprive himself of certain pleasures which are otherwise permitted. Jewish law provides that under certain conditions vows in the form of promises to God which cannot be carried out, may be nullified by proper authority. No vow made to another person may be dissolved without the free consent of that person. (The Jewish Encyclopedia, Behrman House, Inc., 1962, pg. 507)

Thus the Jews swore their allegiance, as well as their undying devotion and dedication to God, making promises of various sorts: if God would only *bless* them. They, most assuredly, were unaware or had forgotten the exhortation of Solomon:

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, that to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by a multitude of words.

When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in

Establish Your Hearts

fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? (Ecclesiastes 5:1-6, emphasis mine)

I do not have any first-hand knowledge of when the Jews, by Talmudic decree (according to the Jewish Encyclopedia), were given the right to break their vows to God, but not to man; but it seems to me, judging by the Scriptures, that would be a violation of the first and great commandment:

Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:29b-31)

The obligation to God ought to be greater than the obligation to man, and our Lord made it so in His sermon on the mount. Nevertheless (according to the Jewish Encyclopedia) the Jews were granted the right to break their vows to God (by special decree), but not to man (unless the man involved excused the vow). This is an example of what our Lord meant when He said, *Ye make the commandments of God of none effect by your tradition.*

Despite this negating of the *schoolmaster* role of the law, James had used the law, lawfully, so that he could make an appeal to their hearts. He had established them guilty by the law and had magnified their lost condition before God; but he also recognized, through the sheer numbers of his audience, there could be some genuine believers among those to whom he was writing.