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COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE

James

by Matthew Henry

To the Students of the Words, Works and Ways of God:

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AN EXPOSITION, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS, OF

THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF

JAMES

The writer of this epistle was not James the son of Zebedee; for he was put to death by Herod (Acts 12) before Christianity had gained so much ground among the Jews of the dispersion as is here implied. But it was the other James, the son of Alphaeus, who was cousin-german to Christ, and one of the twelve apostles, ^(~~ACTS~~) Matthew 10:3. He is called *a pillar* (^(~~ACTS~~) Galatians 2:9), and this epistle of his cannot be disputed, without loosening a foundation-stone. It is called a general epistle, because (as some think) not directed to any particular person or church, but such a one as we call a circular letter. Others think it is called general, or catholic, to distinguish it from the epistles of Ignatius, Barnabas, Polycarp, and others who were noted in the primitive times, but not generally received in the church, and on that account not canonical, as this is. Eusebius tells us that this epistle was “generally read in the churches with the other catholic epistles.” His. Ecclesiastes page 53. Ed. Val. Anno 16-78. James, our author, was called the just, for his great piety. He was an eminent example of those graces which he presses upon others. He was so exceedingly revered for his justice, temperance, and devotion, that Josephus the Jewish historian records it as one of the causes of the destruction of Jerusalem, “That St. James was martyred in it.” This is mentioned in hopes of procuring the greater regard to what is penned by so holy and excellent a man. The time when this epistle was written is uncertain. The design of it is to reprove Christians for their great degeneracy both in faith and manners, and to prevent the spreading of those libertine doctrines which threatened the destruction of all practical godliness. It was also a special intention of the author of this epistle to awaken the Jewish nation to a sense of the greatness and nearness of those judgments which were coming upon them; and to support all true Christians in the way of their duty, under the calamities and persecutions they might meet with. The truths laid down are very momentous, and necessary to be maintained; and

the rules for practice, as here stated, are such as ought to be observed in our times as well as in preceding ages.