

JAMES

JAMES — INTRODUCTION

We have now reached that part of the New Testament containing the General or Catholic epistles. They are so called because addressed not to any particular individual or church, but to the church at large. Yet this is not true of all of them, not true of this one, which is addressed to a particular class of Christians named in the first verse.

There are three persons named James in the New Testament. One was the brother of John, another the son of Alpheus, and a third the brother of our Lord, who is commonly supposed to be the author in this instance.

A peculiar interest attaches to the fact that, as the brother of our Lord, he did not believe on Him as the Messiah up until the resurrection perhaps. Compare [John 7:5](#) with [Acts 1:13](#) and [1 Corinthians 15:7](#). His conversion may have taken place at the time mentioned in the last named Scripture, which, if so, accounts for his presence with the church as shown in the reference to Acts.

As to his religious character, he was a very strict Jew, a faithful observer of the law, both moral and ceremonial, without, of course, relying upon it as a ground of salvation, he gave Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship in their work among the Gentiles, but personally he remained attached to the Jewish form of Christianity. His place in the Christian scheme was to win over the Jewish people, and no one probably was better fitted for this than he.

PERSONS ADDRESSED

The epistle is addressed "to the twelve tribes scattered abroad," which proves its Jewish designation; but that they were Christian Jews is shown in the salutation, where James styles himself "a servant of Jesus Christ."

As to their social condition they seem to have been composed of rich and poor, the tendency of some of the former being to oppress and despise the latter, as we shall see. Like all the other classes of Christians, they were

passing through trial, and like them, too, more or less under the influence of false teachers. The doctrine of justification only by faith was being perverted among them, and from various points of view, their condition was unsatisfactory. The writer comforts them in their trial, but rebukes them for their sins, and seeks to give them instruction concerning the matters in which they were in error.

The style of the epistle is vivid, sententious and yet rich in graphic figure. There is not the logical connection found in Paul's writings, the thoughts rather arranging themselves in groups strongly marked off from one another; yet the writer goes immediately into his subject, and with the first sentence beginning a section says at once what is in his heart. The first words of each section might almost serve as a title for it, while that which follows is the development, ending usually in a kind of recapitulation.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of catholic epistles?
2. Describe the three persons named James.
3. Give a sketch of the supposed author of this epistle.
4. Describe the persons addressed.
5. Describe the style of the epistle.

JAMES 1 — INSTRUCTION CONCERNING TRIALS

"Temptations," in verse 2, is in the sense of trials (see Revised Version margin). Why should they be received with joy (v. 3)? In what spiritual condition will such a reception and use of trial result (v. 4)? What will effectually aid in that direction (vv. 5, 8)? Along what lines of trial were they being exercised (vv. 9, 11)? Notice that the poor man is to find comfort in his truly high estate in Christ, while the rich man is to find comfort in a truly humble spirit before God in view of the facts referred to.

But there are two kinds of testings which come upon believers, those already spoken of as "trials," whose source is divine, and whose purpose is strengthening and purifying, and those now brought into view as out and out "temptations," not from God, but from themselves. What reward

comes to the disciple who successfully encounters these (v. 12)? What is their immediate source and outcome (vv. 13, 15)? What three arguments are presented in verses 13, 17-18, to show that God is not the author of these temptations? On the ground, then, that we have our good from God, and our evil from ourselves, what lesson is drawn (vv. 19-20)? Speaking of our being "swift to hear," whose words has the writer in mind (v. 21)? What shows, however, that the "hearing" he has in mind is a very practical experience (vv. 22, 25)? Speaking of our being "slow to speak," how does he emphasize its importance (v. 26)? In what does "pure religion" consist other than in mere talk (v. 27)? Remember that James is talking to believers in Christ, to those who supposedly have "religion," and he is merely instructing them how it should be manifested. Men are not saved by benevolence and kindness to the widowed and the orphaned, or even by strenuous efforts after a pure life, but by Christ, who bore their sins in His own body on the tree; yet they show that they are saved by such works as these spoken of in the text.

QUESTIONS

1. In what sense is "temptation" (v. 2) to be understood?
2. How are the rich and the poor comforted?
3. How many kinds of testings come on believers?
4. How would you explain verse 27?

JAMES 2 — RESPECT OF PERSONS; FAITH AND WORKS

We next have some admonition concerning respect of persons, or the relation of the rich and the poor (2:1, 13). This would seem to be connected with the trials of the poor mentioned in chapter 1. It not infrequently happens that the people who complain of the abundance of the rich, are the most obsequious in their conduct, as if they expected something from them as a result. Perhaps it was so here. Or it may be, that this instruction laps on more closely to what had been said about "pure religion," visiting the fatherless and widows, and keeping one's self unspotted from the world (1:27).

Respect of persons was incompatible with these things. Note that the Revised Version translates "have" of verse 1 by "hold" These two things could not be held at once and the same time. What instance is given of holding it (vv. 2-3)? Of what wrong would they be guilty in such a case (v. 4)? What kind of judges would such partiality show them to be (same verse)? What would demonstrate the unwisdom as well as unkindness of partiality (v. 5)? What would show their meanness of spirit (v. 6)? Their disloyalty to their Savior (v. 7)? On what principle should they exercise themselves toward rich and poor alike (v. 8)? How were they in danger of violating this principle (v. 9)? What fundamental truth about sin is enunciated in this connection (vv. 10-11)?

INSTRUCTION ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF FAITH AND WORKS (2:14-26)

If the subject of respect of persons grew out of the declaration about "pure religion" at the close of chapter 1, there is reason to believe the same of the present subject.

Before considering the verses, it may be well to remark on a criticism sometimes made that James is here contradicting Paul. The latter insists upon faith without works, while the former insists upon works with faith. But there is no contradiction, because Paul is laying down the principle of salvation, while James is showing the working of that principle in the life. Paul as well as James insists upon a faith that brings forth fruit, and was himself a fine example of it. The epistle of James was written at an early period, before Paul's epistles were generally known and before the council at Jerusalem (Acts 15), which may account for this treatment of the subject of faith from a different standpoint to that made necessary by the admission of Gentiles into the church.

Observe the change the Revised Version makes in the last clause of verse 14. "Can that faith save him?" Faith saves, James declared, but not the kind of faith which produces no fruit. Not dead faith, but living faith. What illustrations of a fruitless faith are in verse 16? And verse 19? What illustrations of a fruitful faith are given in verses 21-25. Read carefully verse 22, which teaches that Abraham's faith was simply shown to be faith, a perfected thing by his obedience to God. So our faith in Christ can hardly be called a saving faith if it works no change in our lives and produces no results.

QUESTIONS

1. What two things are discoursed of in this lesson?
2. What presumably, led the writer to speak of the first?
3. What seems more likely from the context, that "Assembly" (v. 2) means a plan of worship or a lawcourt?
4. What indicates that James is not contradicting Paul in regard to justification by faith?
5. What is the test of saving faith?

JAMES 3 — CONTROL OF THE TONGUE

The third chapter contains instruction or admonition concerning the control of the tongue (3:1-18). Just as the instruction in the other instances grew out of something written in the first chapter, so also here. He had exhorted them to be "swift to hear and slow to speak"; following that he had showed them how to hear in the sense that they must be doers of what they hear; and now he would show them how to be slow of speech in the sense that they should "set a watch before their mouths and keep the door of their lips."

"Masters" in verse 1 is really "teachers." This shows the direction of their temptation to talk too much. They affected teaching, after the manner of those rebuked by Paul in his letters to Timothy and Titus. There was danger in their doing this, as verse 1 indicates. A heavier responsibility rested upon teachers than upon the taught, and there was the likelihood of stumbling in that capacity (v. 2).

Note how he speaks first, of the power of the tongue (vv. 3-5). What three illustrations does he employ? Secondly, he speaks of the evil of the tongue (v. 6). How is it described? What does it do? Whence the source of its iniquity? Thirdly, he speaks of its uncontrollableness (vv. 7-8). With how many wild, and subtle, and strong things, does he compare it in this regard?

After speaking the tongue in general terms, how does he apply the subject to the present condition of things (vv. 9-10)? By the use of what similes does he seek to better it (vv. 11-12)? What is the relation between wisdom and speech (v. 13)? What does the strife of tongues indicate as to the condition of the heart (v. 14)? What is the source of such strife (v. 15)? Its

product (v. 16)? How does true wisdom compare with it as to its source, character, and effects (vv. 17-18) ?

The questions in the text of this lesson render unnecessary any at the end.

JAMES 4-5 — WORLDLY MINDEDNESS

Like other divisions of this epistle this is so connected with the last, and grows out of it so naturally, that it is difficult to say where the division occurs. The writer had been speaking of envying and strife in expression through the tongue, and now puts in his plow deeper to show their source in the antecedent condition of the heart. "Lust" is not to be taken in the limited sense of sensuality, but in the broader sense of worldly pleasure or gratification of any kind.

Verse 2 presents difficulty. Consistency makes it necessary to suppose that James is here addressing Christians as throughout the epistle, and yet how incongruous to think of Christians committing murder to gratify their desires! Luther translated "kill" by "hate," and doubtless expressed the real meaning by so doing, although James used the stronger expression in order to designate with the utmost precision the nature of that evil which, whatever may be the outward form of manifestation, is still the same.

Nor let it be thought strange that such persons should be referred to as engaging in prayer (v. 3), for nothing is more common than for worldly minded Christians to supplicate heaven for the gratification of desires entirely selfish, giving no consideration either to God's pleasure, or the well-being of their neighbors. How plainly James reveals the cause for the non-results of such prayers!

What names does he bestow upon these worldly-minded Christians (v. 4)? How does the language of this verse indicate that he has in mind adulterers in the moral and spiritual sense — professing with the world? What shows the incompatibility of such things? Verse 5 should be read in the Revised Version, showing that the Holy Spirit who dwells in the believer is not a spirit of envy. What was their hope under such circumstances of sin, and in what direction should they look for deliverance (v. 6)? What prerequisite was necessary to obtain this grace (vv. 6-10)? How did the want of humility show itself in their prayers (vv. 11-12)?

But this worldly-mindedness took to itself various forms, and James addresses himself to another in the verses following. What false reliance is spoken of in verse 13? How is it rebuked (v. 14)? What advice and admonition is given (vv. 15-16)? It was not enough for them to know this truth, how does he teach them the need of acting upon it (v. 17)?

What further application of worldly-mindedness follows in chapter 5? Who are addressed now? What warning is given them? "Ye have laid up your treasure in the last days" is the way verse 3, last sentence, should be rendered. How vividly it applies today!

Are we not nearing the last days, and are not treasures heaping up as never before? What three charges are laid against the rich here (vv. 4, 6)? Fraud, voluptuousness, injustice! How awful to think of these things under the cloak of Christianity! Or shall we say that James is here referring to the rich outside the Christian church altogether? It is difficult to say. Notice carefully, however, the judgments coming upon these rich people. What miseries indeed!

The epistle closes as it began, with comfort for the tried and oppressed, verses 7-20. What hope is set before the oppressed laboring men (vv. 4-8)? How different from the strike and the boycott? If the rich of our day be at fault, are not the poor equally so, the Word of God being the standard? What examples of long-suffering patience are set before them in verses 10-11?

What closing recommendations and exhortations are set before all concerning oaths (v. 12)? Concerning heavenly mindedness in the opposite experiences of life (v. 13)? What specific directions concerning the sick (vv. 14-16)? What testimony to the efficacy of prayer? How is it illustrated (vv. 17-18)? With what statement of the believer's privilege and obligation does the epistle close (vv. 19, 29)?

QUESTIONS

1. How would you connect this lesson with the last?
2. What does lust mean?
3. What difficulty is presented in this lesson?
4. What hinders prayer?
5. Who are meant by spiritual adulterers?