

Chapter I

THE TWELVE TRIBES SCATTERED ABROAD

There are three men in the New Testament named James. James, the son of Alphaeus, James, the brother of John, and James, the half brother of our Lord. The church historian Eusebius tells us James, the half brother of our Lord, was the first bishop of Jerusalem (*The History of the Church*, Eusebius, Dorset Press, 1965, Translated by G.A. Williamson, page 72), and tradition tells us he was the writer of the epistle which bears his name. This James served as the bishop of the church at Jerusalem during the period of time when the apostle Paul made his three missionary journeys into Asia and for some time thereafter (*ibid*, page 118).

The church at Jerusalem, which James came to pastor, was made up entirely of Jews, or Jewish proselytes, for the better part of its existence. This church grew rapidly from the one hundred and twenty who were gathered together after the Lord's ascension to over three thousand on the day of Pentecost. A short time later five thousand were added to the church (Acts 4:4), and others were added daily as they were saved (Acts 2:47).

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The fact that all of the members of this church were Jews, or Jewish proselytes, explains why this church was steeped in things Jewish well after Paul's third missionary journey into Asia. This can be seen in James's remarks to Paul, when Paul came to Jerusalem at the completion of his third missionary journey. At that time James said, *Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law* (Acts 21:20).

James's zeal for the law, at this juncture of his ministry, nearly got the apostle Paul killed when he encouraged Paul to purify himself in the temple with four Jewish brethren. It is inexplicable why the apostle Paul agreed to James's request, given the fact Paul had already written his epistle to the Galatians, and Paul would write the book of Romans during his imprisonment at Caesarea following the incident in the temple at Jerusalem. Both of these epistles reveal clearly that the believer is reckoned dead to the law. As difficult as it is to understand why Paul would act contrary to what he knew to be true, the Lord used the events in Jerusalem to aid discerning believers in their understanding of their self-willed capabilities. Even so, despite the confusing nature of these events, the Lord worked them out together for good as the Scriptures promise (Romans 8:28).

It was sometime after Paul's incarceration by the Romans at Jerusalem when James wrote his epistle *to the twelve tribes scattered abroad*. This is readily discerned when it is understood that James wrote to unsaved Jews and not to Christians. In dealing with the unsaved Jews of the *diaspora*, he used the law as it was intended to be used -- as a *schoolmaster* to bring the Jews unto Christ that they might be justified by faith. James's statements about the faith of his audience and their relationship with Jesus Christ is based on their covenant relationship with God, and must not

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be misconstrued to be statements to a Christian audience.

In dealing with these Jews of the *diaspora*, James alluded to their double-mindedness. This suggests they had been made aware of the truth of the gospel, but were still vacillating between Judaism and Christianity. They were much like the Jews who were addressed in the book of Hebrews. The fact that James addressed them as *brethren* does not demand they were his Christian brethren. *Brethren* was a common term used by the Jews to refer to other Jews. All of them were, after all, of the *seed of Abraham* after the flesh.

James's ministry to these Jews can be compared to our Lord's ministry to the Jews. In the fifteenth chapter of the book of Romans, Paul tells us Christ was a *minister of the circumcision*. This means He ministered to Jews by their covenant relationship with God, based upon the law. Our Lord always directed the Jews, who inquired about entrance into the kingdom of God, of their covenant responsibility to the law. Further He increased their condemnation by showing them the law could be violated mentally as well as physically. He directed those condemned by the law to take up their cross (the sign of a curse) and follow Him. He used the law as it was intended to be used, to drive the Jews to Himself so that they might be justified by faith. Because *by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin* (Romans 3:20). This practice would be very evident in our Lord's dealings with the Jews if commentators of reputation (like Scofield and Chafer) had not declared our Lord's sermon on the mount and ministry in general to be instructions for the future Kingdom age.

James understood the grace of God perfectly well. There was no question in his mind, salvation was by faith apart from the deeds of the law. The council at Jerusalem, at which he

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testified, proves he understood this principle in dealing with Gentiles, but it took him a little longer to understand this principle with Jews. However the book of James proves he came to know how to use the law in dealing with Jews. Even so, James' s use of the law and his statements about good works has brought the assumption he was legalistic.

Despite this, a proper understanding of the book of James will reveal James made no attempt to establish the concept of righteousness by the deeds of the law. The law cannot produce righteousness. The law was not and is not a means of life. The law was a ministry of condemnation and death. Paul testified to this truth in the third chapter of his second epistle to the Corinthians. The purpose of the law was to establish guilt and condemnation -- to establish the absolute need of a Savior: *Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith* (Galatians 3:24).

If one reads only the Old Testament and the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) in the New Testament, he will be reading that portion of the Bible which was governed by God's covenant relationship with Israel, based upon the law. After the Gospels comes the book of Acts, which is a transition from the Jewish age of a covenant of law to the present new covenant relationship in Jesus Christ. This means that more than two-thirds of the Bible is presented under the covenant of the law. It is of extreme importance then that we understand the purpose of the law in God's redemptive plan.

No one was ever saved by the law (the old covenant). The hope of salvation was in God's new covenant (which was portrayed in the sacrificial system and fulfilled in Jesus Christ). Thus the new covenant relationship was charged to all Old Testament saints (those who believed the

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promise of God) after Christ was crucified, buried and risen from the dead, at which time *he led captivity captive* and took their souls out of Paradise and into heaven. Thus all Old Testament saints are seen in the New Testament without a single sin remembered against them. The reason for this is seen in Hebrews chapters ten, where we have the terms of the new covenant, and in chapter eleven, where we see the new covenant applied to those who lived by faith.

Paul told the Galatians the law *was added by reason of transgressions till the Seed* [Christ] *should come*, and he instructed Timothy in the proper use of it when he wrote:

As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling: desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind [homosexuals], for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. (I Timothy 1:3-11, emphasis mine)

Paul's statements to Timothy about the proper use of the law prove a grave error is committed if one thinks he can be justified before God by the deeds of the law. This was the error of Judaism. The Jews entered into this error just sixty days after they had been delivered from Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb (which is a type of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ). The Jews' fault in declaring, *All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do*, does not impugn the sanctity and purity of the law. It declares a lack of understanding of themselves. They did not discern their base nature and inability to keep the law.

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The writer of the book of Hebrews called the day they made this declaration *the day of provocation in the wilderness*. In other words it was the day when the Jews provoked God by rejecting His grace and desiring to establish their own righteousness.

In the tenth chapter of first Corinthians, Paul called this incident an act of *unbelief* and *idolatry*. Once the Jews entered into the covenant of the law, they tried to turn this ministry of death into a ministry of life. This became evident in the traditions of the elders. The elders corrupted the law by interpreting it in a manner which gave them a sense of fulfilling it. These Rabbinical interpretations removed the condemnation of the law, making the law impotent to do what it was designed to do: act as a *schoolmaster* to bring the Jews unto Christ. Thus the Jews' view of the law became a vehicle which produced a feigned righteousness, hypocrisy and a vain faith.

It is this error in the thinking of the Jews that James knew very well. Therefore this is the error which James addressed in his epistle. Once James exposed this error, then he could redirect the Jews to the saving grace that is in Christ Jesus. Consequently James is not a Christian epistle. James is a Jewish epistle written to change the minds of the Jews of the *diaspora* and bring them to faith in Christ.