

## Chapter XIV

### YE ADULTERERS AND ADULTERESSES

It has become customary to refer to the various documents of the Old and New Testaments as books, such as the book of Genesis, the book of Isaiah, the book of Jeremiah, the book of Romans, the book of James, etc. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, but some of the books of the New Testament are epistles. Epistles are letters. Thus, as with a letter from a dear one, it would behoove us to read them in their entirety at one sitting.

In the original Greek and Hebrew Scriptures there were no chapter and verse divisions in any of the documents. These were added to provide a convenient referencing system, but their placement was not done, in many instances, with regard for the context. Some of these chapter divisions have been awkwardly placed, and many verse divisions come in the middle of sentences. With our tendency to read a chapter or two, or a few verses at a time, important connections in the context can be interrupted by these necessary references.

We should be aware, then, of the structure of the epistle of James. Each part of each

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succeeding chapter(s) is an integral part of the preceding chapter(s). The argument in chapter three, where James contrasted the wisdom of the Jews with the wisdom that is from above, is a continuation of the theme of chapter one, where James offered his readers the wisdom of God. Likewise chapter two establishes the need for the wisdom which was offered in chapter one by revealing the emptiness of the Jews' vain faith.

Here, in chapter four, James began to close his argument. Thus far, he had established the guilt of the Jews and the vanity of their faith, but he did not hold this against them. James asked:

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. 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 lift you up. (James 4:1-10)

The statement *fightings among you* in these verses is better rendered *fightings in you*. It is a reference to the Jews' inner turmoil and lack of confidence before the law. Basically, James asked, *Why do you have so many fears and doubts in your mind? Why do you worry about your relationship with God?* The answer to this was obvious. The Jews had doubts because of their empty pretense at establishing their own righteousness by failed attempts of law-keeping. Anyone who pretends to be something he is not must be aware of his pretense.

Nevertheless it is possible for people to tell the same lies long enough, that they begin to

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believe them themselves. Do you remember the indictment our Lord brought against the Jews in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew's gospel? He established the guilt of the Jewish leaders when He said:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain [out] a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (Matthew 23:23-28, emphasis mine)

This indictment is every bit as applicable to the Jews to whom James wrote as it was to the scribes and Pharisees to whom Christ gave it. Perhaps there was one difference. The scribes and Pharisees were so steeped in error, most of them would never accept the wisdom from above. However James must have felt there was some hope for the Jews to whom he wrote. Therefore he magnified their failures and their corrupt motives. Some of them had given lip service to faith in Christ, but their double-mindedness had prevented them from receiving the wisdom that is from above. So James wrote, *Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.*

When James told them they were *adulterers and adulteresses*, this was not a reference to a certain sin of the flesh, but to the well-established fact of Israel's idolatry. This spiritual condition was the reason the Jews to whom James wrote were scattered among the Gentile nations of the world. God had judged the idolatry of their forefathers. He had scattered the northern ten

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tribes by the Assyrian captivity and the southern two tribes by the Babylonian captivity.

The Jews to whom James wrote had not changed much during their exile into the Gentile nations of the world. Their fruits were from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their thoughts were centered in the concept of merit and reward -- *a way which seemeth right unto a man*. In a word, they were still worshipping according to the world's system. Thus both the Jews of the land and the Jews of the *diaspora* were described by Paul, when he wrote:

... I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (Romans 10:2-3)

Israel's relationship with the Lord is typified in Scripture by Cain. Cain killed his brother in a jealous and self-righteous rage after rejecting the truth -- *without the shedding of blood there is no remission*. He was sent wandering outside of the paradise of God. Israel had likewise been dispersed among the Gentile nations of the world; and even though some Jews had returned to the land after the Babylonian captivity, their house was once again desolate. They were to be scattered by the Romans in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The world's system is steeped in *the ways of death*. Therefore anyone who is the friend of the world is the enemy of God. In James's age, as well as in this age, man continued to choose the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil instead of the fruit of the tree of life. Man's choice of the fruit of the tree of good and evil in lieu of the tree of life (faith in Christ), makes man a friend of the world and the enemy of God. It makes such a person a spiritual adulterer or adulteress.

There was no question in the minds of knowledgeable Jews as to the meaning of James's

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accusation: *Ye adulterers and adulteresses*. In the Old Testament Scriptures, this was the accusation the nation of Israel received every time they departed from the truth of the Word of God to follow after the various idolatrous systems in the land of Canaan. The commandments of God forbade idolatry; nevertheless Israel had worshipped Moloch, Baal, Ashtaroth and all of the other gods of the land. She had totally embraced the world's system.

Therefore James wrote to the Jews, whose parents had been dispersed because of this idolatry, ... *know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?* The truth that had been given to the nation of Israel (by God through the prophets) had been so corrupted by Jewish tradition that it bore no semblance to the truth God had given them. This has become the condition of many churches under the canopy of Christianity. Paul prophesied of this condition in Romans chapter eleven and in Second Thessalonians chapter two. In Mark chapter seven, our Lord had a confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees, who asked:

... Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. (Mark 7:5-9, emphasis mine)

It mattered not that Judaism had been born in the truth. It mattered not that all of its prophets were men of God. Judaism had degenerated into a system which was void of the truth, and this had been prophesied by many of the Old Testament prophets, so that the prophet Hosea was commanded to marry a whore, that God might show the love He had for Israel. It was Israel's ignorance of the truth of the Scriptures that had gotten her in trouble. Thus Hosea wrote:

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My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. (Hosea 4:6)

And the prophet Amos reiterated the same truth:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it. (Amos 8:11-12)

Israel's self-righteousness and the blindness and the hardness of her heart had prevented the Jews from embracing the message which James and the other apostles preached. Nevertheless the Jews' blind eyes, deaf ears and hard hearts could be opened by the Spirit of God and the Word of God through the preaching of the gospel. This is true because God has chosen by *the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*. Consequently, like the prophets of old, James extended an invitation to them, *Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded*. James's invitation was virtually the same as the invitation of the Old Testament prophets, *Return unto me and I will return unto you*.

God continues to be jealous over Israel's spiritual adultery and her rejection of Him. Even so, God's grace is still extended to His people. If they are to come unto Him, they must come by faith in Jesus Christ, Whom they rejected and crucified. God cannot deny Himself.