

25–26 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

James now comes to the conclusion of this section, giving a second illustration of his main thesis, that the person who claims to “have faith” but whose life does not manifest the born-again life that saving faith inevitably produces, has no true faith at all. And James does so by pointing to the story of the spies who were sent by Joshua to spy out the land, and especially to the city of Jericho (Joshua 2:1ff). It seems very possible that James chose this example because of the stark contrast in the transformation of the life of Rahab.

James first identifies Rahab (רַחַב, *rachav*) as “the prostitute” (ἡ πόρνη, *hē pornē*). The use of the article “the” could most likely be understood as “the well-known prostitute,” pointing to the primary life-style for which she was known, and thus in stark contrast to Abraham in the previous verses of our text.

It is clear that Rahab and her people had been informed about God’s miraculous works on behalf of Israel. When talking with the spies sent by Joshua, she mentions the crossing of the Red Sea, the victory over the Amorites and their kings, Sihon and Og, and she knew that Adonai had given Israel the victory as they entered the land. Moreover, her own testimony indicates that she had confessed the God of Israel to be the true God above all others, for she states:

for Adonai your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. (Josh 2:11)

But it was not merely her words that evidenced her true confession that the God of Israel was the true and almighty God, for she not only received the Israeli spies [here called “messengers” (ἄγγελοι, *angeloi*)] into her house, but she hid them from those who were seeking to put them to death, but also aided their escape. It seems obvious that she did so knowing well that if her actions were made know to the officials of her city, it would have surely resulted in her execution.

Thus, she put her life in the hands of the God Who had proven Himself to be the Sovereign God, both in heaven and upon the earth. Further, as the biblical narrative makes clear, she fully believed that the God of Israel had given the land into their hands, and that they would surely conquer the city in which she lived. The putting of the scarlet

thread in her window as the marker to spare herself and her family when Israel entered to take the city was proof that she fully expected God to give Israel the victory.

Remarkably, Rahab became a wife of Salman and is listed in the genealogy given by Matthew as in the line of Yeshua (Matt 1:5). Furthermore, she is included in the “Hall of Faith” by the author of Hebrews:

By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace. (Heb 11:31)

In choosing Rahab to illustrate the character of true faith, James has clearly given us one “from the nations,” emphasizing that saving faith is known to be possessed by someone whose life continues to be marked by righteousness, the mark of being saved by God’s grace both for Jew and for Gentile.

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. – In the final verse of our chapter (v. 26), James gives a succinct and clear reiteration of his main point in this paragraph, and uses the contrast of life and death. Clearly a human body in which there is no breath is declared to be dead.¹ Likewise, anyone who claims to have faith in God and the eternal redemption He has made through Yeshua, but whose life is not marked by a growing character of righteousness, is not alive in the Messiah but remains “dead in trespasses and sin.” Thus we see that James and Paul are in full agreement.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. (Eph 2:1–2)

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Col 2:13–14)

¹ We should remember that the Hebrew word רוּחַ, *ruach*, can also carry the sense of “breath” (for example, see Gen 6:17; 7:22).

Chapter Three

commentary

We have seen in the first two chapters of this epistle, that James is concerned to teach us about “the tongue,” (1:13, 19–20, 26; 2:3, 12, 16). Now in this chapter, James centers his attention upon this most important aspect of a life submitted to God, that is, how our life of faith in Yeshua brings us more and more in line with His righteous ways, and this will be particularly evident in the arena of our speech and our common conversations with others.

1–2 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

At first reading, it may appear that v. 2 has little in common with the general thrust of the opening verse, which introduces the subject of “teachers” (διδάσκαλος, *didaskalos*). But if we give further thought to this, we recognize that teachers do their work verbally and that if their teaching leads their listeners astray, it is because they are communicating error by means of their words.

The opening phrase, “Let not many of you become teachers,” is governed by the verb “become” (γίνεσθε < γίνομαι, *ginomai*) which can be taken in several ways. It could simply be understood as “seek to become teachers” or it could likewise carry the sense of “setting oneself forward as a teacher.” This second option seems to be what the earlier version of the NIV (1984) has in mind when it translates:

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers,
because you know that we who teach will be judged more
strictly. (James 3:1)

It is instructive that James is clearly addressing those who are part of the messianic community to which his epistle is sent, for he qualifies the plural “you” with the following “my brethren.” Further, he includes himself in the broad description of “teachers,” for he establishes the fact that “we will incur a stricter judgment.”

Since James gives this admonition to the whole community who would hear or read his epistle, it seems clear that by the phrase “Let not

many of you become teachers," he was surely not seeking to discourage those who desire to fulfill the role of a teacher. Indeed, Paul tells us that the man who desires the office of an overseer, desires a good thing. And one of the requirements of an overseer is that he must be "able to teach."

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. (1 Tim 3:1-3)

Rather, it would seem most likely that James is especially warning those who would presumptuously set themselves forward as teachers to recognize that to do so may well set them in a place of divine judgment. The very fact that Paul puts forward clear requirements of character and abilities for a man to qualify as an overseer means that such character and qualities must be recognized by the community before he is admitted to the position of overseer. So there clearly is a process by which a man is given the duties of an overseer, duties which include teaching. That James includes himself as one among the "teachers" who would "incur a stricter judgment" would also emphasize that the position of "teacher" is one that is recognized as having sanctioned authority within the believing community.

One other aspect of James' warning needs to be mentioned. This relates to the proper motivation for those who "desire the office of an overseer," i.e., the responsibility of being a teacher within the local believing community. It is common for some to seek the position of "teacher" out of personal pride and a desire to be seen as important. We may note Yeshua's teaching as recorded by Matthew, and His description of the Pharisees and scribes:

But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. (Matt 23:5-8)

The title "rabbi" had become a recognized position which required

others to receive a man's teaching and to give him a place of special honor. Surely those who fulfill roles of leadership within the believing community should be appreciated and encouraged with thanksgiving and proper honor, even as Paul instructs.

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. (1Tim 5:17)

The important thing to emphasize, however, is that for elders to "rule well" means that they do so in full submission to the ultimate Teacher, that is, to Yeshua, and that in their leading, preaching, and teaching, they do so to point the community to be disciples of Yeshua, to follow Him in accordance with the Scriptures.

Surely this important teaching of James needs to be emphasized in our world. For in our modern times, anyone, via the internet and other digital outlets, can put themselves forward as a teacher and may easily lead people astray. Never before in the history of the world have there been such open opportunities and means for anyone to take up the role of "teacher" and to have the whole world as their audience. Indeed, the so-called "messianic movement" is overly burdened with "teachers" who have very little if any training in the Bible itself, not to speak of the biblical languages. Rather than grounding their teaching upon the Scriptures as carefully studied and interpreted, they rather seek to find whatever is novel and new to "tickle the ears" of people.

...*knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.* – The "stricter judgment" (μειζον κρίμα, *meizon krima*). The Greek word translated "stricter" (μειζον < μέγας) in the NASB carries the sense of "large, great" or "more than the average." What is the "stricter" or "greater" judgment under which teachers will stand? It obviously is not a type of judgment that relates to some form of condemnation, for that which relates to being condemned has been borne by our Savior and all who are in Him have been declared "not guilty." Rather, the "judgment" will be an assessment of how their teaching aligned with the Scriptures and echoed the truth of God to those they taught. Even as all believers will stand before the Lord in that final day and give account regarding their service to the Lord, so teachers will give account for their teaching.

Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians writes:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the

body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.
(1Cor 5:10)

This does not mean that our sins will be brought up, for we know and affirm what the Scriptures teach, that

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Ps 103:12)

Indeed, the New Covenant is marked by the fact that God will remember no more the sins of those who are cleansed by the atoning sacrifice of Yeshua.

They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. (Jer 31:34)

This is the very text that the author of Hebrews quotes when he expounds the blessing of the new covenant, made certain by the blood of Yeshua.¹

Thus, the "stricter judgment" for teachers is that what they have taught, if in accordance with the Scriptures, will be praised, but if there is only little praise from the Lord Himself, it will be evident that their teaching included much that should have been discarded. Indeed, in 2Cor 5:10, in the phrase "whether good or bad," the Greek word translated "bad" is φαῦλος (*phaulos*) which carries the sense of "low-grade; being relatively inferior in quality, ordinary."² When a teacher spends more time drawing attention to himself rather than preaching the word of God and pointing people to Him, this will be seen in the time of evaluation to have been sub-par, and even failing to hit the mark of what God expects of those who teach His word.

Since teachers in the *ekklesia* Yeshua is building have been given a significant responsibility, much will be required of them, as Yeshua taught:

From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. (Lk 12:48)

1 Cf. Heb 8:12; 10:17.

2 BDG, "φαῦλος," p. 1050.