

Genesis 1:26-28

# COVENANT RENEWAL

Matthew 28:18-20

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## THE KINGSHIP OF ALL BELIEVERS (THE COVENANT STRUCTURE OF JAMES) OR WHY THE NEW CHRISTIAN RIGHT FAILED TO LEAD

### Transcendence

Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask of God. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone." (James 1).

### Hierarchy

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. If you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. My brethren, let not many of you become teachers (James 2-3; especially vv. 2:1, 9ff. & 3:1ff.).

### Ethics

Where do wars and fightings come from among you? Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Come now you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming on you (James 4:1, 4; 5:1ff.).

### Oath

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment (James 5:7-12).

### Succession

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The effective prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit (James 5:13-20).

Rudyard Kipling wrote a delightful story called, *The Would Be*

It's all about two British soldiers who want to make their fortune in a far away land. In the process, however, they are tempted with fame, the renown of being **king** of an empire.

Their rise to power happened in an unusual sort of way. In the midst of a battle with some of the natives, one of the British soldiers is hit by an arrow. Only, the arrow

sticks in something on his uniform and does not penetrate the skin. As far as the natives are concerned, however, he has been struck and is indestructible.

The soldier (Danny) immediately becomes the recipient of their homage and adoration. In short, he is worshiped as a god. At first he responds with astonishment, but he begins to think of the possibilities. He decides to be their king, his friend reluctantly agreeing. The associate only wants to grab all the money, a huge cache of gold and precious jewels left by Alexander the great, and high-tail it out of there. Ah, but Danny "would be king." He sees himself as fulfilling the prophecy of Alexander's return. He is another Alexander, or so he thinks!

Danny is taken captive by his own lust for recognition, a craving greater than any other desire: money, sex and power. Mind you, he still lusts. As a matter of fact, he is discovered to be a charlatan when he calls for such humanly pleasure as sex with one of the local females, invoking the suspicions of the priests. Even they can figure out that a god would not need sex. They hesitantly send the girl to him. In her fear over having sex with a god, she scratches him and he begins to bleed. That does it. Gods can't bleed. He's found out, finally caught, and killed.

Kipling's story is appealing for several reasons. It's a whopping good story for one. But Rudyard taps into one man's visceral desires, the urge to rule in immortality. On another level as an Englishman, he sort of weaves the divine-right-of-kings idea, implying only some men can be king and certainly not soldiers. To me the most powerful theme confirms the Biblical principle of kingship. Kings must not be ruled by their desires, or they will rule by their lusts. They must be wise. In Biblical language, they are called to rule **covenantally**.

### Covenantal Rule

The Book of James focuses on the theme of men who are kings, being virtually an exposition of the Old Testament **covenantal** regulations of rule. The first chapter says, "If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1 :5). Sound familiar? For the student of the Bible, this verse should remind him of a striking scene in the Old Testament, **the story of Solomon's asking for wisdom**.

One day the young king is busily worshipping God after a great victory. The Lord speaks to him, offering to give Solomon anything he wants: "Ask! What shall I give you?" (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon does not reply with a request to have unlimited requests or wishes, as we might have done. He doesn't even ask for additional wishes. Instead, Solomon

mon prays a **covenantal prayer**, asking for **wisdom**,

### Transcendence

"You [the Lord] have shown great mercy" (1 Kings 3:6a). Solomon begins by acknowledging God's sovereignty and mercy, a transcendent theme.

### Hierarchy

"To Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him" (1 Kings 3:6b). Solomon recognizes God's hierarchy. He affirms his father as the lawful **vassal** under the Lord.

### Ethics

"You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O Lord my God, You have made your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in" (1 Kings 3:6c-7). Solomon refers to himself as a son, because sons are given rule in the Bible. Sonship is normally a theme mentioned in connection with the **ethics section** of the covenant.<sup>1</sup>

### Oath

"And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too **numerous to be numbered or counted**. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:8-9a). Solomon gets to the heart of the problem. He mentions a people "too numerous to be numbered or counted." This is a direct reference to his father's sin, the unlawful **numbering** of the people (II Samuel 24). The king's numbering was a sanctioning process, because it involved covenant ratification where the people renewed their oath to God, the theme of the fourth part of the Deuteronomic covenant: the **oath section**. Thus, Solomon confesses his inability to lead the people and asks for wisdom to render proper judgement, another **oath** theme touching on sanctions.

### Succession

"For who is able to judge this great people of **Yours**" (1 Kings 3:9b). Solomon concludes his prayer on the theme of ownership or **inheritance**. He implies stewardship. He is not the owner, but God! This is consistent with the covenant structure where the final section addresses ownership and inheritance. He who owns is the only one who can bequeath. Succession is through the owner of the estate. So, Solomon acknowledges succession and ownership through the Lord.

In summary, Solomon covenantally asks for **covenantal** wisdom to rule **covenantally**. Without true wisdom, he would receive the curses of the covenant. With it, he would receive **covenantal** blessing. He did not perceive wisdom in the Greek sense of exhaustive knowledge. He didn't want simple knowledge of facts at all. He wanted the ability to apply properly the Word of God.

Biblical wisdom is not mere intellectualism. This reminds me of a story I read the other day about a wealthy gold miner who had a son destined to take over the family business. The father sent his son back East to study in the finest engineering school and to learn all he could about managing the mines.

The young man studied hard and proudly received his degree and diploma. On his graduation he said to his father, "Dad, I'm ready to go to work. Give me your best mine, and I'll show you how to run it."

The father replied, "No, Son, first you must change into

your work clothes and go down **into** the mine. There you will gain experience. You may start at the bottom and work your way up."

But the son insisted, "Look, Dad, I've been to school. I've received my diploma. With all due respect, I know more about mining than you will ever know. And if you will just give me your best mine, I will prove it to you."

And so the father, against his better judgment, gave his son the most productive mine. For a while it did well. Then one day the father received a letter, stating, "Dad, you know that the mine I am working is backed up to the lake. Well, the water is seeping in. We've shored it up, but the shoring does not seem to hold. What do you think we ought to do?" The father did not answer.

In a few more weeks the son wrote again, "Look Dad, this is serious. We are not able to stop the water. What do you think we ought to do?" Still no answer from the father.

Finally the son frantically wired the father: IF YOU DO NOT GIVE ME AN ANSWER SOON, WE ARE GOING TO LOSE THE ENTIRE MINE. WHAT SHOULD I DO? The father wired back: TAKE YOUR DIPLOMA AND SHOVE IT INTO THE HOLE!

I repeat, wisdom is not mere knowledge. Biblical wisdom is the ability to apply God's law in any situation. For Solomon, it meant the application of the law of God to his subjects.

When James uses this same language at the beginning of his book, he implies that everyone in some sense can be a Solomon, ruling and having influence by wisdom. This is further confirmed when he expounds the laws of kingship, applying them to the Christians in James' letter.

### The Covenant Structure of James

James is a book about the kingship of all believers. The members of the Church can be like Solomon. They too can have wisdom. All they only need to do is **ask for it**. Beyond asking is doing. They need to follow up the request for wisdom with real kingly living, **covenantal** kingly living. For, the book simultaneously tracks the **covenantal** pattern as well as exegetes the laws of kingship from the Old Testament, applying them to the New Covenant Church and society around the Church. The idea seems to be: operate by wisdom in the Church and the world is sure to follow.

Wisdom influences the unbeliever. It becomes a dominant theme every time believers are in the midst of unbelievers. When Solomon rises to great power, he needs wisdom. When Daniel is taken into exile, he uses wisdom to overcome the mightiest nations in the world. When Nehemiah and Ezra return to rebuild covenantal civilization, they use wisdom to overcome all of their obstacles. Whenever the believer appears before a hostile environment, wisdom is the means of overcoming.

James opens on the note of **believer-before-the-unbeliever-in-a-hostile-society**. He addresses his letter to dispersed believers, "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1). This dispersion refers to the scattering of the Church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), for the Church is called the "New Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16).

The covenantal principle of dispersion is the same as in the Old Covenant. God attached a curse/sanction to the covenant. He warned His people of judgment if they were disobedient. He says through His servant Moses that they will be scattered as a result of their disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:64, 68).

This **covenantal** sanction continues in the New Testament, being applied to the **Church**. When members of the early Church at Jerusalem committed sacrilege, growth and mild persecution followed on the coat-tails of growth (Acts 5:1ff.). When they bickered among themselves, growth and harsh persecution followed, Stephen's being martyred for the faith

(Acts 6:1-7:60). The Jerusalem Church is even scattered.

This dispersion is fulfillment of the covenant curse/promise that God scatters covenant breakers. But, there is life after dispersion. Just as Israel of old experienced influence in Babylon after being dispersed, so the Church does the same. God's people overcome through wisdom what Solomon said will be Christ come in the flesh (Proverbs 8).

James sets the theological stage, however, in his opening comments. He addresses a dispersed Church. He tells them to seek wisdom and to exercise **covenantal** influence. Notice, he says nothing in his book about political influence, or at least **attempted** political activity, to the shame of the "New Christian Right." Rather, he describes the **covenantal** kingship of all believers in **diaconal** and evangelical terms.

I believe, therefore, that James precisely explains why the New Christian Right was not only not ready to lead at the beginning of the 1980s, but failed to exert the proper leadership. Its deflected efforts resulted in the transformation of the Church from a house of prayer, engaging in **diaconal** and evangelical efforts, into a den of political thieves, would be pretenders to the throne, infantile believers who would be kings! An overview of the **covenantal** structure of James proves the point.

### Transcendence

. . . Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. . . If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask of God. . . Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone." . . . (James 1).

All covenants begin by proclaiming the suzerain or head of the covenant, hence the transcendent emphasis. Deuteronomy opens with the announcement that the **commandments** given Moses were from God, the Great **Suzerain** (Deuteronomy 1 :3).

James establishes the transcendent theme in the first chapter. He references God and uses His name in various forms more in this chapter than any other. God is the center of the chapter.

Moreover, James underscores the transcendent theme with a discussion of **trials**. How does this present God as Transcendent? As a matter of fact, trials are probably the greatest evidence of God's involvement in a person's life. James begins, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2). For James, trials point to and lead to God. They are designed by the Great Suzerain to declare His sovereignty and to produce wisdom.

The famous Puritan, Thomas Boston, wrote a book called,

He develops a text from **Ecclesiastes**, "Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which He hath made crooked?" (**Ecclesiastes** 7:13). He says,

As to the crook in thy lot, God hath made it; and it must continue while He will have it so. Shouldst thou ply thine utmost force to even it, or make it straight, thine attempt will be vain: it will not alter for all thou canst do; only He who made it can mend it, or make it straight. This consideration, this view of the matter, is a proper means at once to silence and to satisfy men, and so bring them unto a dutiful submission to their Maker and Governor, under the crook in their lot.<sup>2</sup>

This is the thrust of James 1. James declares the **transcendence** of God through trials. Struggles are the crucible

of wisdom (James 1 :5). They **stabilize** the truly faithful (1 :6-7). They humble the proud and prove to the rich what has real value in life (1 :9-12). They distinguish God's work from temptation (1 :13-15). They enable man to see the true source of "every good and perfect gift" (1 :16-18). They teach man to listen, control his anger and learn "Pure and undefiled religion before **God and the Father**" (1 :19-27). In summary, trials orient man to God and to His will. This is wisdom and this is where the covenant of kingship in the life of the believer begins. A man is not ready to rule until he has survived God's trials that demand prayer, quietness and service.

### Hierarchy

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality . . . If you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. My brethren, let not many of you become teachers (James 2-3; especially w. 2:1, 9ff. & 3:1ff.).

The theme of James 2 is **impartial judgment** regarding admittance into the "assembly," more accurately translated **synagogue** from **sunagogen** in the original Greek text.<sup>3</sup> The issue is: **Who** is allowed "into your assembly"? (James 2:2) Only the rich and famous? Or is there another basis for admittance? To answer these questions, the chapter begins with a rebuke for showing **partiality** on the basis of **possessions**, favoritism to the rich to the neglect of the poor. Furthermore, not even partiality to those who keep part of the law should be allowed. Good judgment requires a complete and balanced view of the law. Finally, the chapter concludes with a section on faith and its works, using Abraham, the father of the Jews, and Rahab a harlot, as examples (James 2:14-26). These two extremes of people are examples of how anyone can be admitted into the Church, even a harlot, if he or she is a faithful believer.

This theme of **impartiality on the basis of faithfulness** is part of the second aspect of the Biblical covenant. In part two of the Deuteronomic covenant, Moses instructs the people to select leaders for the royal priesthood who will do the following: "You shall not show **partiality** in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's" (Deuteronomy 1 :17). James follows this theme.

James 3 the famous chapter on the use of the tongue, continues the impartiality theme. It should be remembered that everything in this chapter is primarily aimed at **teachers**. James begins: "MY brethren, let not many of you become **teachers**" (James 3:1). He addresses a hierarchical issue, "too many chiefs and not enough indians." He does so by warning them that very few can control their tongues well enough to be teachers. Finally, he wraps up this section with a wisdom passage (James 3:13-18) that provides a transition into the ethical segment.

### Ethics

Where do wars and fightings come from among you? Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? . . . Come now you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming on you (James 4:1, 4; 5:1ff.).

James deals with three basic themes in the third section of his epistle: **conflict**, **immorality**, and **money**. These three themes have direct parallel with the legislation given to **kings** in the Old Testament. Moses says,

3. The early church met in the synagogue and not just the home, depending on the size and situation. This being the case, the synagogue is co-opted and becomes part of the New Covenant Church model in worship government and architecture.

But he [the king] shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, "You shall not return that way again." Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself (Deuteronomy 17:16-17).

James, therefore, has drawn explicitly from the **ethical segment** of Deuteronomy on kings to develop further the **covenantal** kingship of all believers. The parallel provides great insight.

First, the kings were forbidden to accumulate horses because they symbolized aggressive as opposed to defensive warfare, further representing the pagan lifestyle of Egypt, a life of **getting things by aggressive means**. James addresses the origin of **Wars** among the brethren. He says they spring from an internal warfare of lusts. More importantly, they are a result of trying to **get things the wrong way**. They come because "you do not ask [God in prayer]" and you do not receive because you ask amiss" (James 4:1-3).

Second, the kings were not allowed to have serial marriages, probably for political reasons, because these relationships would create alliances with the world. They were supposed to draw the world into submission to God's standards and not compromise. In direct parallel, James says, "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that **friendship** with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). In other words, cosmopolitan alliances are not to be formed through lives of adultery, rather, **covenantal** ambassadors are to establish suzerain/vassal treaties through lifestyles of fidelity (James 4:7-10).

James briefly returns to the warfare theme with a couple of paragraphs. He discusses gossip (James 4:11-13), what Christ called verbal murder (Matthew 5:21-26). Also, he cites the proper use of **interrupted** time in the midst of warfare (James 4:13-17). He refers to a principle from warfare legislation which says, "When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home **one year**, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken" (Deuteronomy 24:5). This principle concerns the priority of the marriage covenant when interrupting normal warfare. The marriage covenant takes precedent over warfare, or any other activity. And when the year is taken off, the newly married couple is to keep in mind the divine purpose of that year, namely "To bring happiness to the wife taken" (Deuteronomy 24:5b).

James applies this principle when he says, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow, we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there . . .'" (James 4:13). He wants the businessmen to remember the **priority** of their covenant to God when they take a year off to engage in some special activity. So the kingship of the believer can be seriously undercut should his prior commitment to the Lord be forgotten by immorality or even the misuse of warfare and/or vacation time.

Third, back to the legislation of the kings, James comes to the subject of **money** (James 5:1-6). The kings were forbidden to centralize money. They were to influence society through the Word of God, not through a centralized banking system. In other words, they were not to **hoard** money. James criticizes certain rich covenant breakers in the churches for **hoarding**. He says, "Your riches are corrupted [rotten], and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded" (James 5:2-3). Possessions

do not rot, become moth-eaten, or corrode unless they are not being put to use, being **hoarded**. James condemns this violation because it implies trust in money and an attempt to control by money instead of the proper investment of wealth in the kingdom of God.

So, James concludes the ethics section of his epistle with a further development of the kingship of all believers.

### Oath

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the **coming of the Lord**. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. . . But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment (James 5:7-12).

James turns to the subject of **oath-keeping**, **parallel to the theme of oath-taking** in the fourth segment of the Deuteronomic covenant. The temptation for an **oath-maker** is to break his oath for the sake of expediency. The temptation of kings is to be concerned with time and getting the job done as quickly as possible. They tend to ram matters through when the plans don't go on schedule. James warns about too many oaths, implying too many covenant arrangements, further implying too much manipulation to force a time-framework. He wants them to stick with original commitments and trust the Word of God, precisely the Mosaic admonition given to kings; they were told to write a copy of the Word of God as an oath-taking act (Deuteronomy 17:18), reminding them of their commitment (Deuteronomy 17:19), so that they would receive the oath-sanction of "prolonged life" (Deuteronomy 17:20).

### Succession

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. . . . The effective prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit (James 5:13-20).

James concludes his book on the theme of **anointing**. **Whatever the situation, the Church must have the anointing of God to carry out His mission. Prayer and Biblical restoration are the proper means for gaining the anointing of God.** In the case of the sick, the prayer of faith brings healing. In the case of the healing of a nation, "fervent" prayer brings healing as in the case of Elijah. Prayer, however, should include a plan of action of pastoral care to restore people or nations who are "wandering from the truth" (James 5:19). James commissions this program in the final verses of the book (James 5:19-20). Both phases of the anointing of God are important.

This theme of anointing is consistent with the final segment of the Biblical covenant. Moses called Joshua and anointed him through the laying on of hands and **prayer** (Deuteronomy 31 :14). **This anointing was part of the program to restore Canaan to the covenant, for after being anointed, Joshua was to go forward and take the land!** The kingship of all believers is through prayer and pastoral care, finishing the **covenantal** structure of the book.