

8456U

GOSNELL'S SPECIAL EFFORT - 1996

JAMES THE JUST

Speaker: Bro. Roger Lewis

Study #7: Champion of Law

Reading: Matthew 24:10-22

Thank you brother chairman, and again my dear brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, and my dear young people.

Well, we're just about at the end of the story, aren't we? because James now is already dead, but the Jerusalem ecclesia isn't quite dead, and what we're going to do this evening is to trace forward now, the final circumstances of the Jerusalem ecclesia, as it marched towards the overthrow of AD.70.

Now you'll remember then, that in our last session, we looked at the period AD.60 to 65, and we saw how that during those years, there was that interim period of approximately 3 months whereby there was no Roman procurator in the land of Judea, and that during that time, the last of the sons of Ananias took advantage of that interregnum in which to move against James, and that James therefore, lost his life and did so, b&s, at a time, as we mentioned last evening, when the ecclesia could ill afford to lose him, because of the difficulties that they were facing. We saw, did we not in detail? how that we believe the epistle to the Hebrews comes alive, when we look at its background on the backdrop of the circumstances of the ecclesia at that time, and in particular the death of James which we believe called forth this eloquent final appeal from Paul to the Jerusalem ecclesia, preserved by God in His goodness that we all might have an understanding of why it is that Christ is in every respect, superior not only to the Law but to the spirit of law keeping as an end in itself.

Well, that took us through to AD.64, and we believe that it was in that particular year that Peter wrote his final epistle before perishing shortly afterwards in the flames of Nero's persecution, the mad emperor of Rome. What we're going to do this evening then, is to go forward now into the last few years of the history of the Jewish commonwealth. We're going to start with the year AD.66 and we're going to see how that was the year that Cestius Gallus commenced a siege of Jerusalem and then withdrew and so afforded opportunity we believe, for the Jerusalem ecclesia, for the members of the ecclesia to flee out of the city. We're going to follow through how we believe that the ecclesia did do just that, in accordance with the teaching of the Master in Matthew 24, as we've just read. Then we're actually going through the circumstances

of the overthrow of Jerusalem, and what happened to the Jerusalem ecclesia subsequently, after they had moved to Pella, and in particular, we're going to conclude with the story of how the circumcision party finally broke away from the Jerusalem ecclesia, some considerable time later. We're going to come, as it were, to the very end of the story now, of the history of the Jerusalem ecclesia.

Well, we concluded our story last evening in the book of Hebrews and chapter 13, and we might, in fact, take up the record again there this evening, in order to commence the thoughts that flow on from there, Hebrews 13, where we left the apostle Paul writing this appeal to the Jerusalem ecclesia that they might one day step forth out of the city, and find Christ **without the camp**. In the course of his writing, in the words of Hebrews 13, he makes mention of this fact in verse 18 wherein he says, 'Pray for us, for we trust we have a good conscience in all things, willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I **may be restored to you** the sooner'. Then again in verse 23, 'Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you'. It does appear from the writing of the apostle, that he did have hope that he might have one last opportunity to visit the ecclesia. We're never told whether he did, it's only left to inference as to whether he ever did make his way finally back to the Jerusalem ecclesia; some people believe he did, and others believe he didn't, if he did get back, that certainly would have been his final opportunity to speak to the members of the Jerusalem ecclesia, and in particular, to the circumcision party about which he was so concerned.

He was released AD.63, sometime during that year and the next, if he did have chance to return to Jerusalem, it would have been within that period. By AD.64 Peter was dead, within 4 years, by AD.68 Paul would be dead, so in a few years, b&s, all would be dead, all three of them, the three that had particularly fought together on these matters in the Jerusalem ecclesia. Peter, James, Paul all gone! and the ecclesia was shortly to be left very much upon itself. Well, in AD.66, we know that historically, there was a revolt of the Jews. Tensions ran high in the land of Palestine, and as a result of the revolt of the Jews against the Romans, there were many thousands that died; and there was a tremendous wave of nationalistic fervour that swept through the nation, and that caught people up in its embrace, a patriotic glow, and it stirred the hearts of the Jews and all things that they counted as common and special to Jewry; and the things that they remarked on above all that bound them together, of course, as a nation and a race, was **the law of Moses, the temple of God, and the city of Jerusalem**, and they were the great things now that excited the passion of the Jewish people at this time. You see, this all rubbed off on the Jerusalem ecclesia, it all rubbed off on the ecclesia and especially this ecclesia dwelling in this particular city in the very precincts of the temple itself.

Well, things grew to a head, the difficulties with the Romans grew worse rather than better, so eventually we find that the Romans decided that they needed to intervene, in order to settle things down in the province of Palestine. Therefore, in AD.66 the Roman general Cestius Gallus commenced a siege of Jerusalem, and it's one of those

remarkable things of history, b&s and young people, that he came within a hair's breadth of overthrowing the city. It would appear from the historical records, that Cestius himself had no idea just how close he came! The city was on the very verge of capitulating to his army, then all of a sudden, inexplicably, he withdrew his forces. At the very moment of triumph, he withdrew and just before the city was about to be breached. We believe that that was providential, and in the withdrawal that followed, as Cestius Gallus withdrew his forces, there was now going to be, as it were, a quiet period wherein was opportunity for the members of the ecclesia to leave Jerusalem. Immediately after the withdrawal of Cestius, there was the years AD.66 and 67 and 68, before Vespasian appeared, wherein there was now, opportunity for the Jerusalem ecclesia to make their move, and to walk out of the city of Jerusalem for the last time.

You see, the Lord had warned of this, hadn't He? remember that reading in Matthew 24 let's just see what the Lord did say; Christ had said that that moment of time would come when they would need to move out of the city. It would appear that the providential hand of God, that moved to see Cestius Gallus pull away from Jerusalem, provided now the circumstance of time, wherein the Lord's words could be taken up by those who were faithful in the ecclesia. So Matthew 24 verse 15 says, 'When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolations spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day'. The Lord said the day would come when the abomination would arrive, and when the abomination comes upon Judea, then it's time to get out, says the Lord. And He warned the ecclesia and this had been one of the great signs of the times, you see, for the Jerusalem ecclesia now for some 30 years, from AD.30 actually from before AD.30 with the words of Christ here, now the telling time is going to come, 30 or 40 years later, as to whether the ecclesia still upheld the signs of the times that had been given to them.

You'll notice, by the way, that Matthew's not all that specific though, is he? concerning Jerusalem. But the Lord's words are specific in Luke's account, because if you come to the record of Luke 21, Luke adds some further details that aren't recorded in Matthew's account. Now you see, how much more detailed Luke is, in specific terms that could not be mistaken by the members of the Jerusalem ecclesia. In Luke 21 the Lord said this reading from verse 20, 'And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; (and then listen to these words) and let them which are **in the midst of it depart out**'. Now the question is, of course, what's the 'it' of verse 21? and the answer is **the city of Jerusalem** of the previous verse. When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then **let them which are in the midst of it depart out**, so the Lord's words were really very specific, weren't they? as soon as they saw those armies encircling Jerusalem that was to be a providential sign to the ecclesia that it was time to go. This is what Paul was referring to in Hebrews 13, wasn't he? when he said, 'Let us

therefore, go forth to Him without the camp, without the city, without the gate, was the cry of the apostle, and Paul was warning the ecclesia that the day would come when they'd need to tiptoe out of Jerusalem before God's judgments thundered against it.

You see, it was all so simple really wasn't it? so obvious, all one had to do was obey the words of the Lord; but you see, it wasn't as simple as that at all. There are always circumstances that make it difficult to fulfil the requirements of scripture. You see, it was a real test of faith this, when the moment came, it was actually a real test of faith as to whether they would do what the Lord had said. Because, you see, Jerusalem equalled the temple, and the temple equalled the Law! and to walk out of Jerusalem meant more than the physical removal of oneself and one's belongings from just one city, any city; this was the walking away from the whole system of things that the Law stood for, and I'll tell you what the problem is. You see, what happened was this, when Cestius Gallus withdrew from Jerusalem, do you know what happened? We're told that Cestius Gallus withdrew his army a little further up into Palestine and he began to march his armies through a narrow defile, and when the Jews saw that he withdrew, they all poured out of Jerusalem and they pursued after the fleeing Roman army, and when they saw that Cestius had made a strategic mistake, they encompassed him on the other side of this narrow defile, and Cestius Gallus' army was absolutely decimated. The Jews wrought a wonderful and notable victory against the Romans and they came back to Jerusalem with singing and rejoicing, and do you know what their spirit was? their spirit was **NOBODY WILL TAKE THIS CITY! never, ever, this is the place of God's temple!** and that spirit ran strong at that time, and they had the proof in their hands, because they had successfully defeated the very might of Rome itself who had **dared** to march against Jerusalem. You try being in that ecclesia in that city at that time! Oh, it wasn't easy, was it? when the feelings of every hot blooded Jew rose passionate for the defence of Jerusalem, that Jerusalem would never fall. This was a test of faith to the ecclesia, no doubt about that! But the faithful fled all the same, and we believe they fled mainly in those years, AD.67 and 68.

But, of course, by AD.68 another man was on the scene, another Roman, another Roman leader, and there was now going to be a further advance against Jerusalem, and Vespasian, of course, came down into the Land, didn't he? and surprisingly, or perhaps not so surprisingly, providentially another situation occurred whereby an imminent advance against Jerusalem was suddenly stopped; remember? Vespasian came down and all of a sudden he had news, news, of course, of particular interest to Vespasian himself, which was not only that the emperor had died, (which emperor was that by the way? who was the emperor that had died back in Rome? it was Nero, and why was this of such particular interest to Vespasian? and the answer is, of course, that he was going to hurry off to Rome to assume the purple of the emperorship himself). So he went away and an advance against the city of Jerusalem was suddenly, miraculously halted; and for one brief moment there was a further opportunity for members of the ecclesia to leave. Such was the mercy of God, that there was one last chance now, not long, not long to go, because what happened thereafter is Titus, Vespasian's son regrouped the army and recommenced to advance against Jerusalem. Titus brought a

ring of iron around the city! and it was like a vice, and once Titus had his encampment in place, **nobody would get out!** Not even members of the ecclesia, and if they managed to get out, which was highly unlikely, Titus awaited them without, and if they endeavoured to leave from within, the Sicarii zealots were ready to murder anyone who endeavoured to leave the city. If they hadn't left by then, b&s, it was too late, God had already given opportunity!

But for most of the ecclesia, they did go, and Eusebius records the story in these words when he says, 'The Jews, in addition to their wickedness against Christ, were now incessantly plotting mischief against his apostles. First they slew Stephen by stoning him, next James the son of Zebedee, and the brother of John, by beheading, and finally James who first obtained the episcopal seat at Jerusalem after the ascension of our Saviour. But the rest of the apostles who were harassed in innumerable ways, with a view to destroy them, and had driven them from the land of Judea, they had gone forth to preach the gospel to all nations, relying upon the aid of Christ. The whole body, however, of the ecclesia at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there, before the war, removed from the city and dwelt at a certain town beyond Jordan called Pella; here those that believed in Christ, having removed from Jerusalem as if holy men had entirely abandon the holy city itself, and the whole land of Judea. The divine justice for their crimes against Christ and his apostles, finally overtook them, totally destroying the whole generation of these evil doers from the earth'.

The ecclesia had gone, b&s, and with the removal of the ecclesia, the terrible wrath of God burst upon the head of a guilty nation! and the Lord's words of Matthew 22 came true, so horribly true! remember these words in a warning parable that the Lord gave? All of this came to pass, didn't it? Matthew 22, one of the parables of the Lord, verse 1, 'Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding'; (and the servants of verse 3 of the parable, answer to the work of the prophets). Verse 4 says, 'Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fatlings (typical of the sacrifice of Christ) are killed' (the second appeal of the 4th verse answers more urgently now to the preaching work of the Lord and the apostles). But verse 5 says, 'They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. **But when the king heard thereof**, he was wrath; and he sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city'. So it came to pass, b&s, and the armies of the LORD did come, in the form of Rome, and there was war, and there was blood, and there was thunder and there was fire, and there was destruction until over a million people, a million Jews perished in the flames. It wasn't just the city that was destroyed, was it? it was in particular, the temple.

Come and have a look at Acts 6, remember these words of Stephen, or the circumstances rather, that lead to Stephen's defence, and out of the mouth of false

witnesses came a saying that came to be true in its particulars, you see, because Acts 6 verse 11 says, 'That they suborned men which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the Law. for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth **shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us**', these were false words, b&s, from false witnesses, **but** they turned out to be absolutely correct, didn't they? Jesus of Nazareth did come in the form of the Roman armies and destroyed that place. You'll know as well as I do of the remarkable circumstances that lead to the destruction of the temple.

Now Titus had given express command that the temple of God in Jerusalem should be preserved; but a soldier climbed upon the shoulders of another, and fired a burning arrow through one of the windows of the temple into the temple itself. Immediately it caught a light and in the confusion, Titus himself shouted commands that the temple ought to be saved, but such was the confusion of the soldiers that even Titus himself, had to flee for his life, and the temple became one huge conflagration, a ball of fire, and you know, when they finally got into the temple afterwards, they found piled high around the altar of God, great mounds of dead bodies horribly burnt. Mounds of dead bodies piled against the altar, as a testimony that the Law could not give life! and the **daily sacrifice was taken away**. One writer speaks so well of what he calls 'the divine logic of events' and even circumstances that Titus wished to control, he found beyond his ability to control, and the temple of God was razed to the ground. This was, as it were, the very answer of God out of heaven as He thundered judgment not only against Jerusalem but gave His final answer to the circumcision party, because you see, with the burning of the temple, **the Law could not be practised anymore**. God gave His answer from heaven as to the efficacy of the Law of Moses; **it's finished**, says God, and the temple stood in charred ember, to warn all the Jews, that that way of life was now no longer and that God's final answer had been given.

You know, b&s, it is my belief and I've no means of proving it, just knowledge of the circumstances, it is my belief that some members of the ecclesia perished in those flames. That some of the more dogmatic members of the circumcision party, buoyed up with that spirit concerning the temple and the Law, so passionate in their feelings, that they refused the warnings of the Lord and they never did depart from the city. I think some of them did die in that holocaust, but the large part of the ecclesia had left, the bulk of the ecclesia had gone, so you see, they did hearken to Paul's appeal finally, his appeal in Hebrews that they would go forth to Christ, most of the ecclesia listened and they were gone, they were safe, well, safe for the moment at least against the vengeance of Rome, but not safe from the leaven of the circumcision party within, which had travelled with them to Pella. You know, b&s, for the next 70 years, the circumcision party continued to agitate within the Jerusalem ecclesia now found in Pella.

You know, you stop and you wonder about the perversity of the flesh: wouldn't you think that a person in the ecclesia who was a strong proponent of observing the Law, that they would at the very least, reconsider their position with the destruction of the temple? God had wiped out the whole system, wouldn't you at least reconsider your position? Do you know what history tells us? history tells us that after AD.70 the circumcision party became **more dogmatic than ever before**, that the Law was to be observed. Unbelievable! such is the perversity of the flesh! and for another 70 years, there was bitter agitation in the ecclesia.

Well, it had to come! there would eventually be division, and when it came, not surprisingly, it was the circumcision party that made the division and they walked out of the ecclesia. Mosheim in his ecclesiastical history tells us of that moment of time in these words:

'Among the Christian sects which arose in this the second century, the first place is due to those Jewish Christians whose zeal for the Mosaic Law, severed them from the other believers in Christ. The rise of this sect took place in the reign of Hadrian, for when this emperor had wholly destroyed Jerusalem a second time, and enacted severe laws against the Jews, the greater part of the Christians living in Palestine, in order not to be confounded as they had been with the Jews, **laid aside the Mosaic ceremonies**, and chose one Mark who was a foreigner and not a Jew, for their bishop. This procedure was very offensive to those among them, whose attachment to the Mosaic rites was too strong to be eradicated. They therefore, separated from their brethren, and they formed a distinct society in Perea, a part of Palestine and in the neighbouring regions. Among them, the Mosaic Law retained all its dignity unimpaired. They maintained that the ceremonial laws of Moses **must be observed**, not by the Jews only but by **all** who wished to obtain salvation'.

They finally left, b&s, they finally walked out of the ecclesia after a 100 years of agitation within the ecclesia's midst. Thus ended a particularly bitter chapter in the history of the ecclesia. Now I'm going to show you what happened to that particular group once they left the ecclesia. The ecclesia remained and in fact, they eventually returned to Jerusalem, but by then, this particular group had left, and we're told according to a number of different writings that this is what happened to them. I want you to see what happened to this particular group. When they first left the ecclesia, they went out under the name of the **Nararenes** and the Nazarenes were a group who submitted to circumcision, and they kept the Law, but they did believe in the divine sonship of Christ (now that's important, we'll come to that in a moment), they accepted that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of God. They did not regard the Law as binding on the Gentile believers with whom they fellowshipped. So you see, they weren't unreasonable, by the time this particular group had left, although they preferred to obey the Law themselves, they did not believe it was binding upon the Gentiles, and they freely fellowshipped with them.

But you see, there was another stronger group than the Nazarenes, and that particular group was known as the Ebionites, and they insisted on the observance of the Law and circumcision, as **absolutely necessary for salvation**, and they refused to fellowship any who did not agree. You see, they were a much harder line, they had a stronger, tougher stand for the purity of the truth, so they thought. I'll show you how strong their stand was so attached to the Law were they, and you see, this is what happens, b&s, when you become wrong on a matter of doctrine is, inevitably it begins to affect other fundamentals of the faith. You see, what happened to this group was, that they accepted that Jesus was Messiah, but they believed Him to be the son of Joseph; and do you know why they thought He was the son of Joseph? they had a particular reason for believing that He was the son of Joseph, and the reason why they promoted that thought was, that He was the greatest of the prophets, but He was a mere man, and as a mere man they taught, He did not have the authority to abrogate the Law! So they perverted their understanding of the nature of Christ in order to uphold their view on the sanctity of the Law; and one error lead inevitably to another! They used the term 'synagogue' to describe their assemblies, and they venerated Jerusalem even after its destruction, as the house of God. Later on there were ascetic practices added and finally, there were the principles of reincarnation, astrology and black magic thrown in just for good measure, to spice things up a bit! So this particular group, having left the ecclesia, not only left it in terms of the teaching of the truth, but departed to the point where finally their teaching bore very little resemblance to the faith of the believers, of the Jerusalem ecclesia.

Now just have a look at this in terms of their chief writings, this is quite interesting! So first of all, most important for any group like this, they had their own version of the bible. Their version of the bible was entitled, 'The gospel according to the Hebrews'; that was the title they went under, they were always Hebrews, weren't they? these particular brethren and sisters, and it was probably a heavily corrupted edition of the gospel of Matthew; it had very large sections of Matthew deleted, in order to support their particular view of things, and anything, of course, that referred to the divine sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ was edited out of their version of the gospel. So they had their own bible!

They did, of course, entirely reject the writings of the apostle Paul; they regarded the apostle Paul as an apostate. A great deal of their literature focused on casting slander and aspersions on the apostle, and so there was document after document that was written by this particular group, showing that the apostle was a wicked man, a sinful man, a deceitful man, an unrighteous man, a man lacking in integrity or any good whatsoever, that all of his writings were evil and bad. So you see, they had someone that they could focus on as the great source of evil; but you see, not only did they have their great arch enemy as it were, but they had their hero, their champion! and guess who their champion was? why a man called, b&s, James the Just, and the most influential of the Ebionite writings focused on things concerning James: the 'Clementine Homillies', the 'Recognitions', the letter of Peter to James, the letter of Clement to

James, all the principle documents of this group, by the way, were forgeries, everyone of them. They were all documents purporting to be something other than what they were, but they all promoted their particular ideas; and their hero, their champion was James, and he was idolized by the circumcision party, having left the ecclesia. The reason, of course, why they idolized him, is because he was seen as the man who was the scrupulous upholder of the Law! and therefore, he became their hero. And much of the literature of the Ebionites focused on James . The 'Witness', the 'Liturgy of James', the 'Ascent of James' (which by the way deals with his ascension to heaven), the 'proto euaggelion'(2098) of James, the letter of Clement to James is addressed in this way, 'To James the Lord and bishop of bishops, who rules over the holy church of the Hebrews in Jerusalem', and they elevated James, you see, to the position of sainthood, because he was a man who upheld the Law! Startling things were written about James by this group.

They said concerning James, that he was such a pious and a holy man that his knees were thick like camel's knees because he knelt on the floor of the temple for such prolonged periods, praying for others, that he had great thick knees like camel's. They said that this man was so holy that he also was entitled to wear the golden mitre with the phrase 'holiness to Yahweh' across his head. They said that James was such a remarkable man that he was allowed once a year to enter into the Most Holy of all, in common with the high priest. It was all nonsense, b&s, it was all absolute nonsense! and they idolized a man, but they never understood his spirit, because James was the champion of the Law, but it wasn't the Law that they understood, and he wasn't the champion of it in the way that they thought.

In fact, if you come to James, we'll have a look at the way James felt about the Law. His attitude to the Law was absolutely different to how these people idolized him. Remember these words in James 1, you see, they saw the Law as a wonderful bondage that would keep them in the straight jacket of righteousness; but James didn't see the Law that way, he said in James 1 verse 25, 'Whoso looketh into the perfect law of freedom', James saw the Law as freedom. The circumcision party saw the Law as bondage! they said he's the keeper of Law, James said, 'I'm not a keeper of Law, I'm a lover of principle', and the passion that drove James to maintain the Law all his life, which by the way he did, was because he loved the principles. He aspired to the principles of the Law, and wherever he saw a godly principle in scripture contained within the Law that he could aspire to, he did that out of love for his God, but not as an end in itself, and not as a righteous keeping of a rule. They didn't understand the spirit of this man at all, but you see, James knew what the Law was all about, he saw it as the freedom that liberates and transforms a person, that they might live a life before their God on the basis of the obedience of faith.

Come and have a look at James 5 and just one illustration. I think this makes the point, now this is one illustration of many, of course, that we could take from the record. In James 5, James is talking about patience under trial; do you see verse 7, 'Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord'. Verse 8, 'Be ye patient', verse 10,

'Take my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience'. In the middle of this exhortation to endurance and patience under trial, he says in verse 12, 'But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay: lest ye fall into condemnation', and James warns against the holding of oaths or the committal of oaths. Now where does James get those words from in James 5 verse 12? Matthew 5, you're absolutely right, let's have a look at that! (keep you hand in James and let's go back to Matthew 5) so Matthew 5 says reading from verse 33, 'Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the LORD thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all: neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil'.

So James is quoting from Christ, isn't he? and from what in particular? from the Sermon on the Mount! and the Lord says verse 33, 'Ye have heard', verse 34, 'but I say unto you', is anyone familiar with those words? You see, all the way through Matthew 5, verse 27 'ye have heard', verse 28, 'but I say', verse 31, 'It hath been said', verse 32, 'but I say', verse 33, 'ye have heard', verse 34, 'but I say', what's the Lord doing in Matthew chapter 5? The Lord is giving (and listen to this carefully, b&s,) the Lord is giving His exposition **of the true spirit of the Law**, isn't He? We know it's the discourse on the Mount, but what He's really doing in Matthew 5 is, He's giving His explanation of the true spirit of the Law! The Law says this says Christ, but I say unto you that the real principle of that Law is this! and He elevates the thinking of brethren and sisters to the higher principle that lay behind the Law itself. This is Christ's explanation of the Law of Moses, and that's where James is quoting from! Oh, he knew what the Law was all about! he knew the true spirit of the Law and he took it straight from his brother. I'll tell you something interesting, you'll probably know this, but the book of James has a number of allusions to the Sermon on the Mount, does anyone know how many? I know one book on James that reports over 80, over 80 allusions in the epistle of James to the Lord's discourse on the Sermon on the Mount. There's only 5 chapters in James! this man knew the Law, b&s, he knew it inside out and upside down and back to front, he had to, he dealt with Law keeping problems for 30 years in this ecclesia. The circumcision party had no idea of the true spirit of James, who was a champion of the Law, but a champion of its true spirit and its true teachings, drawn specifically from his brother.

It was a tragedy, b&s, that would have upset James deeply, had he still been alive, to know that he was being quoted in this way! I'd like to read something about this particular passage that James quotes from Christ. 'Nowhere else in his epistle does James come quite as close as here, to the language of Jesus Himself. Yet, the special character of his use of the Master's teaching is, perhaps nowhere so clearly marked; there is indeed a very remarkable similarity between James 5 verse 12 and the words

of Jesus in Matthew 5 verses 33 to 37, but it is by no means an exact quotation, and as in other cases, the words are moulded and adapted and applied specifically to the particular circumstances and needs and readers. For the immediate point and interpretation of James' words is different from that of Jesus although the underlying principle is the same. Jesus' words are spoken against the background of the Mosaic ordinance and of Jewish tradition and are intended primarily as a corrective to Rabbinical teaching and practice in regard to oaths and vows of a formal character. James is writing of the heart and voluntary oath that comes so readily and volubly from the unguarded lips of the man for whom God's name is rather the ally of his passion, than the object of his awe. What that's really saying is simply this, that over and over and over again, in the book of James you'll find James **drawing from the teaching of Christ concerning the spirit of the Law**. But he doesn't just quote the Lord exactly, he quotes the spirit of the Lord's teaching and then gives it an application to his own circumstance. He quotes the Lord's words on the Law but gives it a new or fresh application, which shows how well James understood the principles. It's not just parrot repetition, it is an application of principles to new circumstances that James understood.

Yes, he was a champion of the Law alright, but not the champion that the circumcision party idolized within their ranks. Now I want to show you what happened to this particular group, it's quite interesting really in history. Having left the ecclesia what did happen to them? (I've got to be careful that I've got enough pieces of paper here, so that I can handle all of this!) So what happened was that the circumcision party finally left the ecclesia; they were in the ecclesia as a divisive force remember, for a long period of time; these Judaistic Christians that we've come to know as the circumcision party. So when they left the ecclesia, they left under the name as we said before of the Nazarenes and they're mentioned here therefore, as the Nazarene fellowship.

We looked at the spirit of this particular party over the last few days, we looked at the tone and the character of this group over the last few days, we've seen the spirit of their approach to issues in life. Given what we know about their tone and their character, what do you think happened to that group amongst themselves, once they had left the ecclesia? The answer is, Surprise! surprise! they divided! and the reason why they divided is because the Ebionites thought that the Nazarenes were a bit soft, you see, this group was the hard line group within the ecclesia, but when they finally divided, this group thought that the Nazarenes weren't **nearly hard line enough**, so they formed another group and they split from the main group. They became the Ebionites, and these were they who mainly vilified the apostle Paul, and idolized James in their literature and in their writings.

You'll never guess what happened to the Ebionites, would you? They split and they divided into Pharisaic Ebionites and Nicene Ebionites. The reason why they decided to split is because the Nicene Ebionites thought that the Pharisaic Ebionites weren't **nearly hard line enough**, so they broke away and formed another group. And you'll never guess what happened to the Nicene Ebionites, would you? They divided into

Eclectical Ebionites and Clementine Ebionites, you see, this was the fruit of their style, wasn't it? the fruit of their approach was to divide, and to divide, and to divide again. There's no peace in this spirit, b&s, thank goodness all this occurred outside of the ecclesia; by this stage there was black magic and astrology amongst this group! Do you know what finally happened to them? it's a bit difficult to trace all of this through history, but I have a book that traces the Nazarenes for about 4 centuries from the time they first came to Pella; and from the best knowledge that we can gain, it would appear that some of the Nazarene fellowship finally came back into the ecclesia, they finally rejoined the meeting. Do you know what happened to the Ebionites? to the best of our knowledge, they became Muslims! and if you go to the Muslim religion even to this very day, you will find that there is an upholding of the Law of Moses, circumcision is seen as absolutely necessary to salvation, Christ is a prophet, one of the greatest but **just a man**, and the magic and the astrology of the Ebionites is woven into Muslim faith as well.

Now brethren and sisters, these people were once part of the ecclesia! Such was the tragic end of 'the circumcision party', which divided and divided and divided upon itself. Now you know, b&s, what tends to happen in this sort of study, of course, is that people tend to say, 'well that circumcision party, they were shocking! and so they were. But of course, that's the story of history, isn't it? long since passed and long since gone! Well, there's no such thing as the circumcision party today, is there? or is there? and you see, it's part of the spirit of the flesh that the principles that were seen amongst this particular group, are to be found in ecclesial life today, aren't they? Now I'm just going to quote you one or two illustrations of that spirit at work in ecclesial life today. By the way, in case you're worried, I don't really know what's going on in Gosnell's, and I've made a specific point not to ask anyone about what's happening in Gosnell's, or Foothills, in fact, everyone of these examples, I wrote for a talk given in New Zealand; and everyone of these examples hasn't even happened in Australia as far as I'm concerned, they're all drawn from another country. So relax! but they're illustrations of a principle, you'll know better than I do, whether there is any application to them in other ways, I don't know! But I do know what I've experienced in my circumstances of life in the truth, in different places, and visiting different ecclesias in other parts of the world.

I know a circumstance when a visitor came into an ecclesial hall, a young lady, the first time she had ever been to the meeting, she was attending a lecture as an interested friend. She wandered in off the streets, and someone said to another brother afterwards, 'well, she'll have to be told to wear a hat!' Well, yes, of course she will eventually, but what are we going to do, plunk a hat on her head the very first time she walked into the meeting? because that's the law. You see, that's law keeping, isn't it? there's a righteousness within itself and one day we would hope that such an interested young friend will eventually learn the principles concerning the wearing of hats and come to an understanding of that in due time, at the right time; not the first night she turns up to a public lecture!

I know of a similar example where not only was the circumstance commented on to

another brother, but I know of someone else who walked into an ecclesia, a young man, and someone actually went up to the young man, very kindly afterwards, and said, 'you'll have to get your hair cut!' That's law keeping, isn't it?

You see, this group lacked respect, didn't they? part of their attitude was they lacked respect; they lacked respect for elders actually, they wouldn't hesitate to criticize Paul or James or Peter, or whoever came across their path that they didn't particularly agree with, and it can happen in ecclesial life today. 'Huh! the ab's, huh, the ab's wouldn't know what to do! you wouldn't go and see the ab's about that, would you?' and there's a principle of lack of respect! I've been at meetings, amazing meetings! business meetings of ecclesias, one of the most delightful times of all! where people have strong feelings about things. I attended a meeting once where there was a particular controversy that arose about the singing of hymns; one group thought that certain people should sing these hymns and other people thought that they shouldn't sing these hymns. The two sides began to escalate and it got higher and higher, and stronger and stronger and there were flashing eyes, and there were emotions and feelings, and in the end a ruling had to be brought down because it had gone too far! People got passionate and for a moment they took out a temporary membership ticket to the circumcision party, and they pushed their cause so aggressively and so dogmatically and so assertively that left the ecclesia no option but to try and sort something out that should never have got to that position in the first place.

Another thing this party did, remember what they did, irrespective of the decisions made within the ecclesia, that they would agitate afterwards. Remember? Peter gives an explanation in Acts 11, the matter's finished; not according to this group. James gives a ruling in Acts 15, the matter's finished; not according to this group. They would agitate even after the matter was settled, now this happens sometimes in ecclesial life; where ecclesias come together and they make a decision in the matter, whether it's a great thing or a small thing, it doesn't matter; but having decided, b&s, **there the matter should rest!** There's no scope in ecclesial life for endless agitation on issues that have already been dealt with, (and some of them are very small)! I've witnessed an argument in an ecclesia about tea cups, and you scratch your head at the end of it, and wondered what on earth it was all about?

People get agitated about the most amazing things! Problems with others in the ecclesia; you see, what this group was prepared to do, is they were quite happy to hold the ecclesia to ransom, in order to promote their own point of view. I'm aware of situations in ecclesias where people have come along to ab's and said, 'What are you doing about that? what are you going to do about this?' What they really mean is when are you going to boot that person out! that's what they really mean when they talk about, 'why aren't you dealing with this or that?' Worse still, I've seen circumstances where a person says, 'If that doesn't get fixed up, then I'm not coming to the meeting!' That's actually blackmail, b&s, you can't do that in ecclesial life; you can't hold an ecclesia to ransom like that! That's not the spirit of the truth!

Imputation of motives to others! Well, of course, you know why the ab's do that, don't you? or I know why that person was nominated! and motives are imputed to people for various things that they have or haven't done, and quite often you wouldn't have a clue what the real motive was, but people impute them all the same!

It's not good in ecclesial life, the systematic slander of others behind their back, and the spreading of harmful gossip or stories. 'Did you know that brother so-in-so is in trouble with such and such, and so-in-so?' Not only within one ecclesia but spread through other places; this group never hesitated to do that, did they? they would agitated both openly and secretly. That's not the spirit of the truth! Yes, you see, b&s, I believe that the spirit of the circumcision party is alive and well in the ecclesial world today, and the reason why I know that that is the case is, because I think sometimes we're all members! Therefore, we have a responsibility and one of the worst things we can do at this sort of a study, is to say, well I hope they're listening! No, we should really be worrying about ourselves and our own ecclesia and our own family, and our own character. If there's a spirit that in some way we might be unwittingly or sometimes wittingly imitating the spirit of this particular group who were such a trouble of mind to the ecclesia, then we've got to take the exhortation to ourselves, not worrying about applying it to others.

So what do we do, b&s, in order to sort all this out? Well, what we really need to do, of course, is to find someone who knows about that spirit who can give us the antidote to it, someone who's got the answers, someone that can give us those principles for life, that will overcome the spirit of the circumcision party within an ecclesia. That's exactly what we're going to do, b&s, God willing, by way of exhortation on Sunday. We will endeavour then to summarize all the lessons of this story, and to highlight them one by one, and to do what Paul exhorted us to do in Hebrews 13, when on the death of James he exhorted the ecclesia and said, 'Remember, your former leaders who have spoken unto you the Word of God, whose faith followed', and God willing, on Sunday morning, b&s, we shall do just that, and we shall go to the writings of James. A man who fought this for 30 years and knew all about it, and we shall take from him, the spirit to overcome all of this, and to live godly lives before the Father in heaven.