

James 25-03-23a

Greetings, fellow members of Grace & Truth Bible Church and anyone else who happens to catch the sound of my voice now or in the future. This is Sunday, the 23rd of March, 2025. We're embarking on a new study this morning.

I wrestled with what the title of it would be called, and I have decided that we will call it the Study of the Epistle of James, although that's really not the best name. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study, and we'll begin. Father, we're grateful for this time of fellowship, an opportunity to study your Word together, to enjoy fellowship and encouragement in the presence of like-minded believers who share the gifts of the Spirit that you have bestowed upon us individually for the benefit of all.

We thank you for the passage that is before us, and we pray that as we seek an understanding of it and its application in our lives, that God the Holy Spirit will find us ready pupils, apt with memory and insight into how it can make a difference in the way we think and act in the time that remains to us in this life. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. If you will turn in the New Testament past the Gospels and Acts and all of the letters of Paul and the book of Hebrews, you will find in your Bible the Epistle of James.

This I find to be highly unfortunate, and I face the same dilemma we had when we were in the Old Testament looking at the Song of Solomon, because it is not the Song of Solomon, it is the Song of the Shulamite. And in the same way, this is not the book of James, this is the book of Jacob. It is the Epistle of Jacob.

All of the individuals that you find in the New Testament are named James, but in Greek, in Aramaic, throughout Scripture, they are Jacob, Yakobu. And the transition to this name is something that we will discuss, but for our first session, if you have turned to James 1, and we read James comma, that's as far as we're going to get. So with that being said, who is James? It is important in the context to understand.

You say, what's in a name, is it Yeshua or Jesus, and so on, but it is very important. This sets up context. You will see that in verse 1, once the writer is identified, the audience is identified, and they are the 12 tribes scattered abroad.

Who is the father of the 12 tribes? Jacob. This is no accident. There is meaning and significance to the name of the writer.

And this goes throughout your Gospels. There are a number of different individuals that are identified as Jacob, translated James, in your English Bible. How did this come about? It wasn't in 1611.

This precedes the King James Bible by over 100 years in English translation. In a nutshell, because I don't find it more than explanatory in terms of helpfulness, the Latin for Jacob is

Jacobus, with a US on the end. Over the centuries, around maybe a thousand years after Christ, this got slurred or compacted into Jacobus, where the B changes to an M. Then the C starts to drop out, and Jacobus becomes James, and this happens before the time of the King James.

Some of the earliest English translations. It is a corruption through the Latin, and like so many things that come to us from the Latin Church, it's unfortunate, to say the least. I've debated whether I want to just change the name, scratch it out in my Bible.

It's kind of too late. There are those who prefer to refer to the Lord Jesus as Yeshua, which I think is great. That is His name.

That is His Old Testament linkage name. People that are not students of the Word of God don't understand that He shares a name with Moses' successor, and that has significance. Jesus is Moses' successor in the spiritual sense, the way that the Joshua of the Old Testament was His successor in the national arena.

So, we're going to continue to say James, but just be aware, we will frequently see that His name, Jacob, is significant. So, James. There are a number of individuals who are named James in the New Testament, and you have, for example, first and foremost, James, the son of Zebedee, John's brother.

Secondly, in the list of disciples, you have another James, James, the son of Alphaeus. Remember, there are two Shimon's. There are two Jacob's.

There are two Judas's, and this James, the son of Alphaeus, is also thought to be James the Less in the Chosen. If you watch that program, they call him Little James, which is a fair translation. We have James, the Lord's brother, who is mentioned a couple of times in the Gospels along with Joseph, but there is Jacob and Joseph, both brothers of the Lord, and Jude or Judas.

You have two Judas's in the list of disciples. So, who do we have so far? See if you can keep track. We've got James, the son of Zebedee.

You've got James, the son of Alphaeus, who I think is also James the Less, Little James. You've got James, the Lord's brother, who is not numbered among the disciples as the first two are. You have, in other places in the Gospels, James, who is called James, the son of Mary.

You have James, the brother of Jude. In the introduction to the letter of Jude, he says, Jude, the brother of James, writing. And then we have James, referred to as the leader of the Jerusalem church, who is generally thought to be James, the Lord's brother.

But there are arguments pro and con. These are the generally understood Jameses. I think there are probably four.

James, the son of Zebedee. James, the Less. James, the son of Alphaeus.

James, the son of Mary. And this is a different Mary than the Lord's mother, Mary. And James,

the Lord's half-brother.

You can consolidate or expand on those in a generally fruitless and non-applicable way. However, it is very important for us to understand who wrote this letter, the epistle of James, this letter of Jacob that is the book following Hebrews in our New Testament. Who wrote this? Universal opinion is that this was written by James, the Lord's brother.

He was a leader in the Jerusalem church. You see this in Acts chapter 15. You see it again in Acts chapter 21.

So, that is who it is generally accepted as having been the author. I disagree. And once again, you know, feel free to take this with a grain of salt.

I am at the end of a long set of footsteps into unbroken snow here. But I do not believe that James, the half-brother of the Lord wrote this letter. I do not believe that he wrote it for many reasons, which I am going to share with you.

And the reason is, it is not just, does it matter which guy wrote it? Yes, it does. Why does it matter? Let us turn back to the scriptures. And I am not going to give you all of these references.

You can Google these. You can look them up. I want to move rather rapidly through.

But you know that the brothers of the Lord did not believe in him until after the resurrection. That is given to us in Luke. Luke says his brothers did not believe.

After the resurrection, obviously, they come around. And it is believed that the James, who led the Jerusalem church, he is later in church history called the first bishop of the Jerusalem church. I do not believe in bishops.

But if you want to say he was the episkopos or the overseer or the senior elder, that would be the half-brother of the Lord. However, I want to do a brief biography of that James. James, the son of Mary and Joseph.

There are some who argue that maybe he was already on the scene when Jesus was born, because Joseph, the father, as it was thought of the Lord Jesus, had a previous family. And either through the Levirate Law or having become a widower, that he then is betrothed to Mary and these other brothers. This largely comes from the Catholic notion that Mary is a perpetual virgin, and that in the same way, the tomb of the Lord Jesus, where no man had previously lay, that also the womb of Mary would have been a place where no other individual was ever generated.

It's a nice thought, but I wouldn't doubt that somebody used the tomb after Jesus left it. In Jerusalem, I doubt that they kept it as a shrine until centuries later, and then they couldn't even figure out which one it was. And I don't think the womb of Mary was never occupied again.

I think the brothers and the sister or sisters of the Lord were known to the community, and Mary was their mother. That said, this James did not believe in the Lord Jesus until after the resurrection. That is clear.

So he did not accompany the Lord Jesus during the time of his earthly ministry. And that is significant because he wasn't there for the Sermon on the Mount. He wasn't there for the Sermon on the Plain.

He didn't travel with the Lord Jesus and hear his teaching firsthand the way the disciples did. Even in Acts, when Peter decides it would be a good idea to replace Judas with someone who has been with us from the beginning, he did not choose any of the Lord's brethren for that. It's too soon.

Evidently, the brothers of the Lord did not come to faith until weeks, months, sometime after. But in any case, Jacob or James, the brother of the Lord, half-brother if you want to be specific, was not considered to replace Judas in the lineup of apostles. So the James who presides over the Jerusalem Church first comes to prominence after the death of James, the son of Zebedee.

If you turn back to Acts chapter 12, you have recorded at the beginning of that chapter, about that time, and this is just after Peter sees the sheet let down and arise Peter kill and eat what God has declared clean, let no man call common. And this is the inception of the message that originates and is assured to the current set of apostles that the apostle Paul is going to be a legitimate representative of the Lord Jesus when they meet him with his message that God is including the Gentiles in his plan and purpose. He first reveals it to Peter so that Peter can provide affirmation a couple of chapters hence.

But right after that, which is in chapter 11, you have chapter 12. About that time, Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.

Because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter. This is where you're going to have Peter in prison and the story proceeds. But James Jacob, the son of Zebedee, is slain in Acts chapter 12, verse 2. Okay, so when you flip over a few pages to Acts chapter 15 and there comes a discussion and a dispute about whether or not Gentile converts to Christ should keep the law, you have the Jerusalem Council.

This is where James, the half-brother of the Lord, the leader of the church, first comes into prominence and we have an extensive speech from him here. So they came to Jerusalem in verse 4 of chapter 15 and this is Paul and Barnabas. Certain others of them went to Jerusalem, that's up in verse 2, and they met the apostles and the elders.

Remember, James, the half-brother of the Lord, is not an apostle. Who selected the apostles? Who called them? Who went up to the mountain and called the 11 who survive? Judas disappears from the scene by his own hand. So you have the 11 and who is the replacement?

Not Matthias, back in the early chapters of Acts, but Paul, called on the Damascus road.

Paul identifies himself as an apostle called... You look at Romans, the first few verses, he says, I am a slave of Jesus Christ, a called apostle. And he goes on to compare his apostleship to that of the other apostles. So that's year 12.

James, the half-brother of the Lord, we can say with certainty, is not an apostle. That's an important point. So he would be under the elders listed here in chapter 15, verse 4. Apostles and elders, they reported the things that God had done with them.

This is Paul and Barnabas. The sect of the Pharisees, some of them who believed, rose up and said, it is necessary to circumcise the Gentiles and bring them under the law of Moses. You remember this dispute.

So the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. When there had been much dispute in verse 7, Peter rose up and said to them, men and brethren, and then he details his experience. And it is repeated from chapter 11.

And in verse 12, all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles after they had become silent. James, Acts 15, 13, James answered saying, men and brethren, listen to me. Obviously he is now going to deliver the final word.

He seems to have been promoted to be the leader of the Jerusalem church. And this dispute, the arguments pro and con, the Pharisees make their case. Peter, Paul and Barnabas make their case.

And the final decision is now going to be stated by the senior officer present, which is in this church, James. And in verse 13 through 29, you have this episode. James speaks and then they write a letter to accompany the apostle Paul back to Antioch and other places detailing their decision.

In a nutshell, and we have covered this when we did the book of Acts, but in a nutshell, this is not an inspired choice. That in the same way that Peter decides that they should elect by casting lots, Matthias to be the replacement apostle and he's off the mark. He doesn't know that the Lord Jesus is going to call Saul of Tarsus, who will be Paul in the same way you will notice in this chapter.

And this is an important point of application. If you have an important decision to make and you want to honor the Lord, it is not enough to talk about scripture. It is not enough to hear the apostle Peter detail a vision, a firsthand account of a vision he received from God himself.

And what does it say? What God has declared clean, let no man call common. And the metaphor there in that vision is Gentiles who come to faith in Christ are declared clean by God. No ifs, no ands, no buts, no conditions, no exceptions.

Like it says in chapter 16, verse 31 of this same book, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are saved. The question here becomes, after their salvation, should they keep some or all of the law? If you listen to the apostle Paul, read the book of Galatians for example, we are no longer under the law. Read Romans.

The law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. It has been superseded. There is no part of the law of Moses that is necessary to keep in order to be in good standing with God.

Now our behavior will align and comport with divine standards of righteousness that are reflected in the law. But our righteousness is what God declares righteous, not what Moses declares righteous. Moses is a version.

Moses has an expression. This was God's message to the nation of Israel that reflects divine righteousness. But we don't accomplish righteousness because it's in the law.

We achieve righteousness by faith because it is the message of the Lord Jesus. It is the message of the New Testament. The righteousness of the law was a schoolmaster for Israel to prepare them for the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Now that the Lord Jesus has come, there is a new and living way. And it does not involve continuing to look to the law for guidance about righteousness. Where do we find our righteousness now? It is the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit.

It is the message of the entirety of God's word. But we do not do or fail to do or stop ourselves from doing certain things because it is in the law of Moses. We have a higher standard of righteousness.

So what is happening here in Acts 15 is a compromise with legalism. James tries to divide the baby here. He tries to keep both sides happy.

Okay, Gentiles don't have to be circumcised, but they do have to follow dietary restrictions. And write these things to them in verse 20. Abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.

These are things that were particularly odious to the Jews based not only on the law of Moses, but on their tradition and their culture. And in order to encourage fellowship, shared meals, and so on, this seems to be the aim of the exhortation. It is repeated in the letter in verse 28.

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things. Abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, things strangled, and from fornication or sexual immorality. Not murder, not worry about honoring father and mother, not coveting, and so on.

These selective things are an appeasement, a compromise, and they do not succeed. They confuse the issue. This is the James who evidently, without recourse to prayer, James is the one

who comes up with these conditions, these limitations, or these regulations for the Gentiles.

He is not an apostle. Where he says the Holy Spirit says this, and at what point did the Holy Spirit descend upon James? Peter received a vision, and the vision didn't say what God has declared clean so long as they refrain from idols and things strangled and blood and fornication, I declare them clean. James is adding a restriction to what was clearly communicated by God in the preceding chapter.

In my view, James here is just as wrong as Peter was when he tried to elect the 12th apostle chapters earlier. This is a bad idea. That is chapter 15.

Turn to Acts chapter 21. This is Luke speaking, and he says, we, this is he and the apostle Paul and the others that are leaving, having met the Ephesian elders and knelt and sorrowing that they would see his face no more. There's already been prophetic words that bondage and chains await Paul in Jerusalem, but he's determined to go.

So it came to pass when we departed from them, set sail, running a straight course, came to various places. They stayed seven days in Tyre and finding disciples in verse four of Acts 21. They told Paul through the spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.

Do you see, this is the actual Holy Spirit speaking, Paul, do not go to Jerusalem. It doesn't get any more clear. There are disciples who for a week tell Paul, the Holy Spirit's message, Paul, you are not to go to Jerusalem.

In direct disobedience, when they had come to the end of these days, we departed and went on our way. They accompanied us with wives and children until we were out of the city. We knelt down on the shore and prayed.

When we had taken leave of one another, we boarded the ship, returned home, finished our voyage, came to Ptolemaeus, greeted the brethren, stayed with him a day, et cetera. On the next day, verse eight, we came to Caesarea, entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven and stayed with him. Remember the seven deacons that were identified early on, Stephen being another one.

This man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. We stayed many days. Agabus came down from Judea.

When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. How many times does God have to tell Paul, don't go? I've got eleven other apostles who can communicate under the influence, ministry, and power of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem and Judea. Why are you going backwards instead of to the Gentiles? When we heard these things, we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Luke, the inspired author of the Gospel of Luke and this book of Acts, is pleading with Paul, don't go. Everybody is telling Paul the clear message from God is don't do this. Paul answered, what do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? I'm going to go anyway.

So we ceased in verse 14 saying, well, will the Lord be done? So you look to verse 18. After coming to Jerusalem, they received him gladly. On the following day, Paul went with us to James, and all the elders were present.

When he had greeted them, he told in detail the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, you see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law.

They have believed in Jesus, but they have not understood the abrogation and the setting aside of the law of Moses. So these are misinformed and misguided Jews who do not understand what God is doing. They have been informed about you, that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying they ought not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs.

What then, verse 22, the assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. Therefore do what we tell you. And you have the story of the men who have taken a vow, take them, be purified with them, pay their expenses, which the law of Moses says they are supposed to pay for themselves, that all may know the things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly, and you yourself keep the law.

This is James, the half-brother of the Lord, the leader of the Jerusalem church, talking concerning the Gentiles who believe we have written and decided. We have written and decided. What happened to the Holy Spirit that he mentioned earlier? It seemed to us good and to the Holy Spirit.

Now he says we have decided and written that they should observe no such thing except to keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. That's what we find most horrifying. And to be in our fellowship and to be considered Christians by us, they've got to follow these regulations, these strictures.

So Paul is corrupted by James's argument. And he goes and is purified with these four men. He enters the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time the offering should be made for each one of them.

When the seven days were almost ended, how did this go over with the Jews? Well, Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help. This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place. Furthermore, he brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy

place.

They say this because they had seen Trophimus, who is a man from Ephesus, a Greek, in Paul's company, and they assumed Paul had taken him into the temple, which he actually didn't. But this does no good whatsoever. James's idea that this will settle everybody down and they will accept you and we'll all be unified and happy has the opposite effect.

And there is an uproar in all of Jerusalem as they seek to kill Paul. This is going to result in the vow by 40 men to eat no food and drink nothing until they have slain Paul, if you continue in this chapter. I will tell you that for these reasons among others, I do not believe this is the James who wrote our letter.

This guy does not understand grace. He does not understand righteousness. He does not understand what happened to the law.

And you have to assume that at some point he changed his mind. He recovered. He took a different tack.

I don't see it. I don't believe it. You can analyze his words, and certainly in the Greek here, they have been perhaps influenced by Luke, who knows excellent Greek.

And you would imagine that these conversations and these words took place in Aramaic, since it is Jews talking to Jews, and perhaps they have become more elegant. But the form, the style, the substance, the content of these extended words that we have from James in Acts chapter 12 and Acts chapter 21 do not resemble the words that we find in the epistle of James. There's a different emphasis.

They are thematically different. And I don't believe this individual was qualified to speak the inspired words of the Holy Spirit and put them into a letter and send them to the 12 tribes. I can't make it work.

He's not the guy. So, who wrote the book of James? You say, well, couldn't it be James Jacob, the son of Zebedee? Remember, he was slain back in Acts chapter 12. And this is the strongest argument against him having anything to do with it, because the issues that are addressed in the epistle we're about to look at are thought to be from a more developed time, where there is a sense of community and so on that doesn't exist in the earliest days of the church.

So, who wrote our book? I will tell you that I am convinced the James of the Jerusalem church isn't the guy. What is our point of application for this first lesson? Just because someone talks about the Holy Spirit, just because someone alludes to the fellowship and to the scriptures, doesn't mean they're right. How do we know what is right and what is wrong? How do we know what is true and what is misleading? What is a misunderstanding, a misconception, a misconstruing of the scriptures? God the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

God the Holy Spirit fills us. God the Holy Spirit will respond with the word of truth when we are

humble, when we pray, when we ensure that our minds are not cluttered with unconfessed sin, that we are meeting the conditions for divine guidance, which you know very well. You know how to walk the narrow road and head for the straight gate.

We've seen this innumerable times throughout our New Testament studies in particular, as well as reinforced by what it says in the Old Testament in Proverbs. And it is critically important that we be prayerful. There is a way that seems right to us, and it's not.

This seemed right to James. He got agreement and assent and consent from the assembled people, including Paul and Barnabas, but not for the first time. Paul will be led astray on that occasion.

And again, when he comes back and participates in this vow, he gets himself arrested and largely restricted in his mission of sharing the gospel with the Gentiles. God can work all things together for good, but God told Paul repeatedly, don't go to Jerusalem. You're going to get tangled up with James, the apostle Peter.

Remember, Paul has to rebuke him because men from James came and Peter started acting funny about eating with the Gentiles. James is a bad egg. And if you ask me, he did not write this letter.

So who did? Well, how do we stay on track? How do we ensure that we are on the right path? We expose ourselves consistently to the teaching of the word of God. We pray and we cultivate the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to give us spiritual instincts, spiritual insight, spiritual understanding to walk in the way. If we ask, if we seek, and if we knock, God is going to respond.

You don't find James in prayer in Acts chapter 12 or in Acts chapter 21, Acts chapter 15 or Acts chapter 21. Neither one. It doesn't say James halted the proceedings and said, let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Let's seek the word and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. He opines. He decides what the standards will be.

He doesn't even cast a lot. Peter at least ostensibly thought God could be involved if they cast lots, but he only gave God two choices. We have to be so careful to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, leading us to applicable scriptural truth for the decisions of our lives, especially big and important decisions that affect a lot of other people.

And that's what did not happen in Acts. So who wrote our letter? We will take another run at it after the break.