

Faith Without Works is Useless

An Expository “Journey” Through the Epistle of James

1- Introduction

December 06, 2020

James 1:1a

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...

To the Glory of God

Now there are two words; some say two Concepts; or two biblical Truths that are very important when you’re talking about loving and obeying Jesus:

1. Orthodoxy
2. Orthopraxy

Orthodoxy means: “Right Believing” and *Orthopraxy* means: “Right Living”. And the way this works is that Orthopraxy is the result of Orthodoxy. In other words, “Right Living” is the product or the result of “Right Believing”. Another way of understanding this is to say that what you believe determines how you live your life. So, if you believe correctly; or biblically- then you will live correctly; or according to the Bible. But if you don’t believe correctly- if you are confused; or ignorant; or deceived about biblical Truth- then your life will reflect that in a wrong or sinful lifestyle.

But believing rightly doesn’t happen by accident. You don’t trip and fall into Orthodoxy. You come into Orthodoxy on purpose. Yet trying to figure out on our own what we are supposed to believe- won’t help us reach Orthodoxy either. Thinking that we can achieve Orthodoxy by simply using our own human logic and reasoning capabilities will result in us embracing things that God did NOT say; and trusting in things that are NOT true. And that is because God doesn’t think like a human being and He doesn’t operate according to human logic. God thinks like God. And God operates *exclusively* like He is the Owner and the Creator of the Universe.

So, to achieve Orthodoxy *requires* that we are taught by a Source that is *external* to ourselves. And that Source is the Holy Bible. And Orthodoxy will help us to understand at least two things:

1. What we are to believe; or what we are to embrace; or trust in; and confess
2. Why we should believe it

Now what complicates this effort is that when we come to the Bible to be taught- we don't come as a clean sheet of paper. We don't come to Scripture as an empty cup- seeking to be filled. Why? Because we *already* believe certain things; and we *already* reject other things. So, in addition to needing to be taught what to believe and why we should believe it- we also need to be "untaught" what we already believe that isn't true. And both of those things have to happen at the same time.

So, as Divine Truth is being poured into us from the Bible- false beliefs; and inconsistent beliefs; and partial truths; and myths- will be removed from us. Because we can ONLY receive and accept and believe Divine Truth to the extent that false beliefs are exposed and rejected.

But because we are all fallen creatures- we simply can't trust our own logic or our own reasoning capabilities on how to live our lives- any more than we can trust ourselves in what we are to believe. So, in addition to being taught about what we are to believe- we also must be taught how to live our lives.

And so, Orthodoxy is not merely nice. Unless we understand what God has said- we will believe in almost *anything*; and we will reject almost *anything*. So, Orthodoxy is *mandatory*. But Orthopraxy is mandatory as well.

So, as you purify your Belief; as what you believe becomes more and more biblical- then your life will reflect that; and will become more and more godly. But if you are content with what you already believe- regardless of whether it is what God said infallibly in Scripture- and your progress toward Biblical Purity wanes- then you will soon become *disillusioned* with the Christian walk; and you will be drawn into Worldliness and Sin.

Another way of comprehending these two Concepts is to understand the distinction between "Justification" and "Sanctification". Now, it is true that Sanctification is *part* of the overall redemptive Plan of God called, "Salvation". In fact, Sanctification consumes the *majority* of our time and effort. But Sanctification is what happens to people, who have already been justified. Nobody is sanctified until they have, first, experienced the Miracle of the New Birth and have been justified by Faith alone. And once that happens- every genuine believer enters into the lifelong process of "Progressive Sanctification."

Now God has dealt with me to spend an enormous amount of time Teaching and Preaching about Sanctification. I became very concerned several years ago about the lack of knowledge in the average believer's mind about this amazing Gift of God. And so, God led me to get into Sanctification in great detail. And what I

have found out- is that there is great confusion and very shallow and even false Teaching about what Sanctification actually is; and why we go through it.

As we have discovered, the word, “Sanctification” was a Latin *transliteration* of a Greek word (*hagiosmos*; Strongs #38) that has to do with being Holy. So, the word, “Sanctification” *should have* actually been “*Holification*” or the process by which born-again believers are made Holy. But because there is so much bad Teaching about Salvation itself- many people have no idea why God would want us to be made Holy in the first place or why it matters. And so, it is common to hear people, who profess to love Jesus, talk about Sanctification as though it is optional; and has no effect on our Salvation- even though the writer of **Hebrews** infallibly said,

Hebrews 12:14

Pursue ... sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

Now another way of understanding the Concept of “Holiness” or being “Holy” is to understand a person, who is sovereignly “called out” of the lost world and Sin; and “called into” the Presence and the Blessings and the Kingdom of God. So, to be “Holy” is to be “separated” from Sin and Rebellion and to be “set aside” for God’s use. It is to be “unlike” or “different” from the lost, pagan world.

Now there are a few challenges concerning this Epistle that we need to understand. Normally, the first few Chapters of a New Testament Epistle deal with Orthodoxy; while the last Chapters deal with Orthopraxy. The first Chapters deal with how lost sinners are justified; and the last Chapters deal with how people, who have already been justified, are made Holy.

But the **Epistle of James** is not like that. Almost *immediately*, James begins to tell people, who have already been justified- how to live their lives. So, James *bypasses* almost all Orthodoxy and gets into Orthopraxy from the “git-go”. For example, look what James wrote in the beginning of his Epistle:

James 1:2-4

- 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,**
- 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.**
- 4 And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

So, James gets *immediately* into how those believers, who have already experienced the Miracle of the New Birth; and who have already been justified- are sanctified. Look closely at verse 3 again:

knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance

Here, James discusses how the testing of the Faith, **that we have already been given**, produces Endurance or Perseverance. In other words, James is teaching how the testing of the Faith that, God sovereignly gave us in the New Birth, produces an Endurance that will keep us saved until we go into Heaven.

Another Challenge in **James** concerns the distinction between Faith and Works. The fact that the **Epistle of James** bypasses almost any Doctrinal teaching- *especially* about how lost sinners are saved by Grace ALONE; through Faith ALONE; in Christ ALONE; and to the Glory of God ALONE troubles people. And this is why the great Reformer, Martin Luther, called James, the “*Epistle of Straw*”¹. Now many teach that Luther even advocated that James be taken out of the Bible. That is simply NOT true. But he *did* advocate that it be taken out of the public schools of Germany. Luther said,

“We should throw the epistle of James out of this school, for it doesn’t amount to much. It contains not a syllable about Christ. Not once does it mention Christ, except at the beginning. I maintain that some Jew wrote it who probably heard about Christian people but never encountered any. Since he heard that Christians place great weight on faith in Christ, he thought, ‘*Wait a moment! I’ll oppose them and urge works alone.*’ This he did.”²

Now a quick search through the Epistle of James reveals that Luther was correct- James did not write the word, “*Christ*” anywhere in his Epistle. But he did use the word, “*Jesus*”, and in **James 2:1** even called Jesus, “**Lord**” and “**glorious**” as he continued to teach how already saved people should live their lives:

James 2:1

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of personal favoritism.*

... so, with all due respect, there is no doubt that Luther was simply wrong about this and James clearly loved Jesus and saw Him as the Treasure of the Universe.

¹ Martin Luther; *The Works of Martin Luther*; Book 35: pages 362

² Martin Luther; *The Lecture at Wittenberg*; Book 54; pages 424-425

And this is why James' Teaching clearly advocates a lifestyle that reflects the Teachings of Jesus.

But we must put this Challenge in context. God used Luther to light the fire that became the Protestant Reformation. And the very Core that Luther repeatedly stressed- is the very Heart of the Biblical Gospel: **Justification is by Faith ALONE.**

So, Martin Luther's main problem with James was that, on the surface, it appears that James was *contradicting* the Apostle Paul about how lost people are justified. And many people, mostly within the Roman religious system, use this "supposed contradiction" against Protestants all the time. For example, James wrote,

James 2:24

You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

... whereas the Apostle Paul wrote:

Romans 3:28

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

So, is this a contradiction in the Bible? No. The short Answer is that Paul was writing primarily to those deceived by the Heresy of Legalism while James was writing to those deceived by the Heresy of Lawlessness. But as we get into Chapter 2- we will find that James was making a clear distinction between Faith and Works. So, instead of thinking that Paul and James- were facing each other and fighting against each other with completely different Teachings- we need to see that these two great men are standing back to back- defending the Biblical Gospel against two different Heresies.

So, the Christian Church as a whole; and each believer individually should be in a constant search for "Orthodoxy". We should be *always* striving to be "biblical" in what we believe. And this is what the Reformers meant by the Latin phrase,

"Semper Reformanda"

... so, the Christian Church should be ALWAYS REFORMING; or ALWAYS STRIVING TO BE BIBLICAL.

And there is only one way to do that: We are to take each Book of the Bible and go through it- verse-by-verse. And by engaging in that Process- we will

eventually be exposed to every single area of Divine Truth contained in the entire Bible. And we will then have an opportunity to answer three Questions:

1. What does that verse *say*?
2. What does that verse *mean* by what it says?
3. What does Obedience to that verse look like in the 21st Century?

... and Lord willing, that is the way I will exposit the **Epistle of James** to you, each Lord's Day- until we have covered all 108 verses of this magnificent Book- sometime next year.

Now the process of arriving at what each verse actually says involves going back to the original language that James used when God the Holy Spirit moved on him to write that Book. And by also utilizing the rules of grammar of the Greek language; and discovering the correct Context of that verse- we will discover the one single Meaning of that particular verse that James had in mind when he wrote it.

To answer the second Question involves discovering the Doctrine or the Theology that James taught in that verse. So, this involves finding out what Divine Truth James was teaching.

We must remember that it doesn't matter what that verse may mean to us. James had something very specific in mind when he wrote that verse down. And our jobs are NOT to re-invent the wheel. God is not interested in our creativity; or how expansive our imagination can be. Our sole responsibility in Preaching and Teaching is to accurately and fully unveil what that particular verse meant to James- at the time he wrote it.

Now if we could walk up to this man and ask him what he meant by what he wrote- that would solve the problem. But we can't- because James is dead. And so, what we have left- are the words he used. And we can all be thankful that Koine Greek- is a very *precise* language. And so, in the same way that God poured out a unique anointing and unction on James, who was an ordinary but specially chosen man- to write down sacred Scripture- God also used very ordinary but specially chosen nouns and verbs and adverbs and adjectives and pronouns and prepositional phrases that are Inspired; Inerrant; and Infallible.

So, the way to understand what God has said is by understanding what those very precise words meant at the time James wrote them down. Other than that- we are simply guessing. And since our eternal souls are at stake- guessing is not a viable option.

But while it is true there is only ONE SINGLE correct Interpretation of every verse of the Bible- there may be many APPLICATIONS of that verse. And that is what Question 3 seeks to answer: "*What does Obedience or Adherence or*

Submission or Acceptance to that verse look like in the 21st Century?” And that is what “Orthopraxy” is all about. And that is also what the **Epistle of James** is all about. In fact, in **James 1:22-25**- the writer said

22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;

24 for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

So, another way to understand the distinction between “Orthodoxy” and “Orthopraxy”; or the difference between “Justification” and “Sanctification” is to also comprehend the distinction between “Faith” and “Works”. And even though there is much confusion about this subject in our day- Biblical Christianity is amazingly simple and clear about this. We are saved; or justified; or forgiven and made Righteous- by what we believe in; what we trust in; and what we confess. And that is what we mean when we say that lost people are justified, by “Faith alone”.

And that means that *nobody* is saved by *anything* that we “do”. God doesn’t “*see our hearts and know that we mean well and allow us entrance into Heaven based on that supposed internal ‘goodness’*”. And the reason for that is simple: No matter how sincere we may be in our efforts to please God; no matter how hard we try; no matter how much effort we put into it- our efforts at “doing something” for God or doing something” to please God- are simply not good enough. Everything we do for God or in the Name of Jesus is filled with error; and fault; and even sin. So, if our Works are what saves us- then *nobody* would be saved- because NONE of our Works are perfect.

Yet, in spite of that obvious Truth- every single false religion and human philosophy (that competes with Biblical Christianity for the souls of people)- all preach and teach some rendition of this very thing. They all teach: “*A lost person has to ‘do’ something in order to be in Right Standing before God.*” And the only areas where the many false religions of the world *differ*- is in the details of what they teach that people must “do”.³

³ Some wayward versions of Christianity teach that a lost person must be baptized; others teach that lost people must speak in tongues. The Roman religious system teaches that if a lost person faithfully attends the Mass; partakes of Communion; and goes through the Rite of Confession- over time- he will be saved. Judaism commands adherence to at least one of the ten Commandments to be saved. While Islam teaches that if a person dies- while obeying a

Biblical Christianity alone teaches that all of our “doing” is carried out AFTER we have already been saved. So, the many things that the Bible clearly teaches that saved people OUGHT to do; that we are COMMANDED to do; that we MUST do- are merely humble; loving; and frail RESPONSES to already being saved.

Now since the Bible emphasizes that we are Forgiven and made Righteous based on “Faith” alone- far too many come to the wrong conclusion that this Truth makes “Works” to be optional. That since we are not saved by what we “do”- then our “doing” is not very important; and has no effect on our Salvation. Nothing could be further from the Truth. Because we prove that what we believe in is true- by how we live our lives.

The Bible that teaches that Justification is by “Faith alone” also teaches that EVERYONE who has been justified engages in “Good Works”. For example, the Bible that says in **Ephesians 2:8&9:**

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

... is the *same* Bible that says this in **Ephesians 2:10:**

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

So, there is a constant tension between Faith and Works. And that is *why* so many are confused about the distinction between them. So, in His great Mercy- God moved on James to pen down this amazing Epistle that will help us navigate correctly through the wonderful Truths about both Faith and Works.

Now you would think that, since the Christian Church has been on the earth for over 2,000 years- that most people in the Church would have a handle on the Issue of God’s Grace. You would think that we have advanced way beyond the many Heresies and False Teachings that plagued the early Church about the Issue of God’s Grace. But I am sad to report to you that to the average church member who sits on the pew of the average church in the 21st Century- is as confused about the Grace of God as they were when James wrote this Epistle. For the most part- we understand things like Damnation and Judgment and Hell and Condemnation very easily. Yet Grace eludes us. And so, we have a great need to be taught about the most precious Commodity that the world has ever known- the amazing Grace of God.

legally declared jihad- he will enter into Heaven.

Now how do I know that? Just ask the average person, who lays claim to be saved- to define Grace- and you will usually get one or two word answers like, “*It’s great!*” or “*It’s wonderful!*” or “*I don’t know what I’d do without it!*” And Grace is great; and it is wonderful; and we wouldn’t know what to do without it. But that doesn’t tell me what Grace is.

So, on the one hand, while some wrongly teach that Good Works save us- others wrongly teach that since we are saved by Faith alone- Works are completely irrelevant. *Both* of these false Teachings are perversions of the Grace of God; and *both* are Heresies that will damn the soul.

Those, who teach that Works save us- are deceived by the Heresy of “Legalism”; while those who teach that Works are *irrelevant* after Salvation have been deceived by the Heresy of “Antinomianism” or “Lawlessness”. So, it is important to keep both Faith (Belief) and Works (Deeds/Fruit) in proper Balance. The **Epistle of James** was written to help us do that by telling us in **James 2:20**:

... faith without works is useless

Now the 21st Century is defined by great Compromise; and The Curse of Worldliness; and unrestrained Lawlessness- at least here in America. People honestly believe that they can do whatever is right in their own eyes and that God will eagerly receive them into Paradise. So, Sin is rarely discussed- even in Church. And the certain and eternal Penalty for unrepentant Sin- that is clearly and repeatedly taught in the Bible- is either minimized or outright ignored. And the glaring lack of warning sinners about the coming Damnation of God; along with the earnest plea for rebels to run into the safety of God’s Grace is truly an embarrassment; and one of most prevalent scandals that characterizes the worldly and materialistic American Church. So, the result will be that far too many Church Leaders will stand before God with the blood of these people dripping off their hands.

Doctrinal Purity is routinely condemned today as being “Legalism”. Theological Preciseness is seen as “putting an unnecessary burden on God’s people”. And the intentional pursuit of Biblical Holiness is in such short supply these days that many new converts don’t even know what it is. Truly, we live in the “Age of Lawlessness”

Yet please hear me, dear friends, when I tell you that the most prominent Danger that we face- is NOT that we ourselves might fall into being part of the problem. No, the greatest challenge that we face is that we may wrongly assume,

that the “fix” for the Heresy of Antinomianism is to run into the perceived “safety” of Legalism.

We need to understand that Paul condemned Legalism more than he condemned Adultery- and Paul was hardly “soft on sin”. But Paul understood that *both* Legalism and Lawlessness were Heresies. And James understood very clearly the great danger of the Heresy of Lawlessness.

Now in Jesus’ day, the Culture itself was legalistic. Today, ours is lawless. But *both* are “Doctrines of Demons” (**1 Timothy 4:1**). *Both* are perversions of God’s Grace. *Both* are Evil. *Both* will damn the human soul. Neither one is closer to the Truth. Neither one is better than the other. Neither one is pleasing to God. There is NO redeeming quality in either one. We are NOT safe with either one. And the Bible condemns *both*.

So, rather than run toward Legalism in order to avoid Antinomianism (or vice versa)- we should run into the Arms of God’s Grace- since neither Lawlessness nor Legalism correctly represent God’s Grace. But that requires that we beg God to help us to understand Grace. Because Grace does NOT operate according to human Logic or Reasoning.

Because of the Fall- many wrongly believe that God thinks and acts and operates according to our ways. But that has never been true. God is supernatural- in that He operates “above the natural”. So, God does NOT think; or act; or operate according to our Logic or our Reasoning. Here is how God Himself put it from **Isaiah 55:8&9**:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

But when did God say this? During Creation? No. When He was conducting warfare against the enemies of Israel? No. God said this when He was talking about Grace and Salvation. Just look at the previous two verses:

Isaiah 55:6&7

Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the Lord, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

... and that means that both God’s Grace and Salvation are NOT carried out according to human Thoughts or human Ways. But that

means that neither Faith nor Works coincide with human logic either.

So, whereas the fallen sons and daughters of Adam have a pretty good grasp about things like: Judgement and Retribution and Damnation- Grace and Mercy and Salvation remain surprising elusive for many people. And that means that most people simply do NOT have a biblical grasp on either Faith or Works.

Now how do I know this to be true? Because I have asked people to simply define the word, “Grace”- and then I have listened to the most unbiblical Answers that are based on nothing but human Thoughts and Ways. And that confusion carries over into their understanding of both Faith and Works. Thank God the **Epistle of James** teaches us how to understand them.

You would think that after the Church has been on the earth for over 2,000 years- we would have gotten a grip on the subject that we sing about; and talk about; and preach and teach about more than any other. Yet because far too much understanding about these wonderful concepts are NOT based on what God has infallibly written in sacred writ- their understanding is not merely wrong- it is also destructive.

Because you can't have it both ways. If it is true that we are justified by “Faith Alone”; if we are forgiven and made “fit for Heaven” based on what we believe in; and what we trust in; and what we confess- and NOT on what we “do”- then what we believe in; and what we trust in; and what we confess- matters.

And that also means that believing in the *wrong* thing- will stop us from being saved. And putting our Hope and Trust in the *wrong* thing- will leave us in our sins. And confessing something that *isn't* true- will leave us unsaved and lost. And that is why Orthodoxy matters.

Because it isn't our Sincerity that saves us. Being really sincere about something is fine- even admirable. But if we are absolutely sincere about something that isn't true- then all we are- is sincerely wrong. It is also NOT how passionate we may be about something- that washes our sins away. Look, I'm all about being passionate. But if we are passionate about something that God didn't say- we have simply wasted our Passion and we will remain lost.

So, we must believe in what God tells us to believe in. We must put our Hope and Trust in what God has deemed to be trustworthy and able to provide what we hope for. And we must be careful that what we confess with our mouths- is what God has infallibly written in Scripture. That is why Doctrine matters.

But how do we know that we have, in fact, been justified by Faith alone? One way is to examine what we do and how we act- in response to being justified. And that means that we have a great need to be taught about the relationship between Faith and Works. And we must not only be taught what these things are-

but also what they are NOT. And the **Epistle of James** is a Gift from God that will equip us to do that.

So, “Works”; or “Deeds”; or “Godly Fruit” are the *unmistakable* Proof or *undeniable* Verification of our Conversion. So, all who have already been justified by Faith alone- bear godly Fruit. They can’t help it- it isn’t their fault- their nature has been radically and supernaturally and miraculously and eternally transformed by a sovereign Act of God the Holy Spirit.

And now these wicked rebels love God. And they manifest or show or display their love for God- by striving to obey Him. But it wasn’t their choice- it was God’s. It wasn’t their decision- it was God’s.

And some of this godly Fruit is automatic. It will be born by all who are saved- *regardless* of their level of understanding about other parts of the Bible. But other Fruit; other kinds of Works will appear gradually- over time- as the individual becomes more biblical and more holy. So, some Fruit or Works come by way of comprehending the Bible- but some pops out on those who are saved- in spite of their ignorance of Scripture.

But ALL who are truly born again- WILL bear fruit. They WILL engage in Good Works. In fact, they have been called into those Good Works by the very same God, Who justified them by Faith alone. So, even though fruit may differ in intensity and amount (some will be 30fold; some 60 fold; and some 100 fold)- every person who has genuinely experienced the miracle of the New Birth will bear godly fruit or engage in Good Works; or carry our Good and godly Deeds to some extent.

And that means that those who don’t bear any fruit- are proving that whatever Salvation experience they *think* they had- was a lie. So, it is the godly Fruit that we bear; it is the Good Works that we carry out; it is the Godly Deeds that we engage in- that *prove* that we have been justified *without* Works- by Faith alone.

Now when you’re reading and studying the Bible- you have two choices:

1. You can “take out of” the Scriptures- what God the Holy Spirit put into them. That is what is called, “*Exegesis*”
2. Or you can “put into” the Scriptures what you *want* them to say. That is called, “*Eisegesis*”

... and, of course, the only correct way is to exegete- or to “take out of” the Scriptures what God the Spirit infallibly put into them. But to do that, properly- requires that you deal with the “Language Issue”. In other words, the Bible was NOT written in English. Originally, the Scriptures were written in Hebrew,

Aramaic, and Greek. So, those are the “Biblical Languages”. And if you’re going to do justice to the Word of God- you simply can’t avoid having to work with one, two, or maybe even three different languages- depending on what part of the Bible you’re dealing with.

So, “Language Issues” are some of the greatest challenges that we face when we seek to “rightly divide” or “correctly interpret the Word of Truth”. And it is so important- that if I had it to do all over again- I would go back to school and learn how to speak and read and write in fluent Hebrew; Greek; and Aramaic- because those are the languages of the Bible. In fact, until my lifetime- most theological seminaries *required* those who would be in the Ministry to do just that.

Now what does that have to do with our “journey” through the **Epistle of James**? Well, for starters- nobody named, “James” wrote a single word in the Bible. The name, “*James*” is an English *transliteration* of the original name for the man, who wrote this Epistle. In ancient Hebrew, his name was “*Ya-aqob*”; and in Greek, later brought into Latin- his name was “*Lacobos*”. And “*Lakobos*” became “*Lacomus*” which relates to “*Jacobos*”- which finally became “*Jacob*”. So, “*James*” was actually “*Jacob*”. And Jacob was a Jew, who never spoke a single word of English.

Now since we can read a lot about the Old Testament Patriarch named, “*Jacob*”- I have no idea why the NT Jacob’s name was *transliterated* into the Anglican, “*James*”- but it was.⁴ Now I completely understand why the biblical writer named, “*Judas*” was happy that his name was changed to “*Jude*”- because Judas Iscariot betrayed the Lord. But why somebody thought it would be a good thing to change “*Jacob’s*” name to “*James*”- I have no clue. And since nobody would know what to do if I told you to turn to the “*Epistle of Jacob*”- I’m going to go along with the English transliteration of his name- and call this man, “*James*”.

But just in case, you think we are finished with our struggle- let me burst your bubble and tell you that there are at least four different James’ mentioned in the New Testament.

1. “The *Apostle* “James”- one of the sons of Zebedee [Aramaic: *Boanerges* (Thunder)]and older brother of the Apostle John (**Matthew 4:21; Mark 3:17; Luke 6:14b**)
2. “The *Apostle* James, the son of Alphaeus”- the brother of the Apostle Matthew/Levi (**Mark 2:14**); also known as “James the Less” (**Mark 15:40**)
3. “James the father of Judas”- not Iscariot (**Luke 6:16a**)

⁴ There is an erroneous myth that King James wanted his name to be in the Bible and that is why the translators of the KJV did this. Even though this is widely believed- there is no proof of this.

4. “James the half-brother of Jesus”- also known as “James the Just”⁵

So, Jesus called two men, named James (Jacob) as Apostles. John’s brother and the son of Alpheus. Now we know almost nothing about James the son of Alpheus or James the father of Judas (Jude?)- but we know quite a bit about John’s brother- who was also an Apostle.

Now I wasn’t alive back then, but history tells us that the half-brother of Jesus was called, “*James the Just*” while the son of Alpheus was called, “*James the Less*”. And “James the Just” initially *rejected* Jesus as being God Almighty in human flesh until after Jesus was raised from the dead. Now it is interesting that this James was NOT an Apostle- proving that Christianity was not about nepotism. Yet, according to history, this James became a believer and eventually became the Chief Elder (Pastor) of the Church in Jerusalem. And it was *this* James, who led the first Church Council- the Council of Jerusalem- which rejected the heresy of Legalism- which was recorded for us by Dr. Luke in **The Acts 15**.

Now we know that Jesus called both James and John into Salvation and into the Ministry. And we also know that because James is always listed *first*- that this means that either he was older than John or that he was being used by Jesus more than John- at least at that time.

Now we also know that- before they were saved- James and John were known as- the “Sons of Thunder”. And this nickname was NOT given to them because they were sweet and gentle men. They were both fishermen and so, it is probable that they were rough and tough men, who were used to the harsh life on the Sea of Galilee. Evidently, they both had a fiery temper or were even violent or both before their Conversion.

But this James’ importance is verified by what Dr. Luke wrote in **The Acts 12:1&2**, where the good doctor tells us that it was this James, who became the very first Apostle to suffer martyrdom.

Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

... and **The Acts 12:3** tells us that it wasn’t until Herod saw that killing James pleased the Jews- that he arrested Peter. And this tells us that by killing James *first*- Herod considered James to be an even greater threat than Peter at that time.

⁵ The Church historian, Eusebius, wrote, “*This James, whom the people of old called, the “Just” because of his outstanding virtue was the first, as the record tells us, to be elected to the episcopal throne of the Jerusalem Church*”. That would mean that this James was the Leader of the “Jerusalem Council” of **The Acts 15**.

So, we know from this that it was NOT John's brother who wrote this Epistle. History tells us that it was "James the Just" the half-brother of Jesus, who was the Pastor of the Church at Jerusalem, who wrote this Epistle. Yet this James was NOT an Apostle. And so, it is possible that either Paul or even Peter may have commissioned James to write this Epistle.

Now an interesting fact is that Dr. Luke wrote in **The Acts 12:17** that after Peter was miraculously released from prison,

... he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.

Now this may only be Peter showing due respect to the Pastor of the Church at Jerusalem. But by Peter making sure that his miraculous release from prison was reported to James- this COULD even mean that Peter considered this James to be someone to whom he was accountable to.

We also know that this Epistle was one of the very first (if not THE first) of the New Testament Books to be written- sometime around 44-49 AD only some 15-20 years after the Resurrection of Jesus.⁶ So, it is interesting to see that the Apostles thought it was very important, from the very beginning, to make sure that believers were taught about the correct relationship between Faith and Works.

Finally, we also see the great Humility that was in James. So, when he COULD have put his personal pedigree at the forefront by telling everyone that he was the half-brother of Jesus- James simply said,

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...

... so, hold on to your hats- our time in the **Epistle of James** is going to be a very amazing journey!

Amen. Let's pray.

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This is a single transcript in a larger series of teachings taken from a verse by verse "journey" through the **Epistle of James**. You are free to reproduce it and distribute it as the Lord leads you- without cost or reimbursement to us with the stipulation that

⁶ Because of the calendar change- it is possible that Jesus was born around 4BC. And since we know that Jesus was 33 years old when He was crucified- that puts His Death (and Resurrection) around 29AD.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.