

***“James the Brother of Jesus” prepared for the Raquette Lake Chapel, week of 9-29-2024
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James, the brother of Jesus, became the most prominent leader in the church at Jerusalem by the time of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). He also is the traditional author of the Epistle of James. In the NT his name appears in Matthew, Mark, Acts, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, James and Jude.

The first mention of James by name in Scripture is in Matt. 13:55. Then the names of four other sons of Mary and Joseph, who was almost certainly dead at this point, besides Jesus are listed, along with a vague reference to 'sisters' in v. 56. Since the name of James is placed first among the brothers, it is fairly likely that James was the oldest of the brothers after Jesus. However, since the brother listed after James is Joseph (v. 55), and it was common for the eldest son to be named for the father (Luke 1:59–60), it is possible that James' name was placed first because of his prominence at the time of the writing of the Gospel. The name for Jesus, who was not the physical son of Mary's husband, Joseph, was previously commanded by God (Matt. 1:20–21).

An even earlier passage almost certainly also refers to James. In Matt. 12:46, Jesus' 'mother and brothers' are said to be waiting to speak with him. Upon hearing of their request (v. 47), the Saviour redefined his family as 'whoever does the will of my Father in heaven' (v. 49). Though he almost certainly did not understand the spiritual reality of Jesus' point at that time, a seed was probably planted in James' mind that contributed to his understanding of the nature of the church in his ministry as a church leader.

Because of **the apparent lack of understanding of Jesus' role by James** and his brethren in the Gospels, it is virtually certain that James' conversion to Christianity did not occur until after the resurrection of Christ. He was probably in the Upper Room along with the apostles, Mary and Jesus' other 'brothers,' also now converted (Acts 1:14). That season of prayer (v. 14) took place only a few days after the resurrected Lord appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). Prior to that, 'his brothers did not believe in him' (John 7:5), even though they were impressed by Jesus' miracles (v. 3).

It must have been a confusing, if not highly frustrating, thing to grow up in the home of Joseph and Mary, as the younger brother of Jesus Christ. Both parents certainly believed that Jesus was the long-anticipated Messiah, but even they did not always understand him. (Luke 2:49–50). The other children certainly would have noticed that Jesus was 'filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him' (v. 40). That Jesus never sinned and that his growth was perfectly balanced (v. 52) probably engendered jealousy and resentment in the younger siblings.

Although Joseph and Mary undoubtedly had told James and their other children that Jesus had a very special role to play in God's plan, it was still probably baffling to them how Jesus could leave the family business around the age of 30 (Luke 3:23). If Joseph was dead by that time, as seems assured by his absence in the family passages in the Gospels (Matt. 12:46; John 2:1), Jesus, as oldest son, would have been the head of the household. Since

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Jesus was a 'carpenters' son' (Matt. 13:55) who had worked and become known as a carpenter himself (Mark 6:3), it would have been natural to assume that he would have continued at that trade. Perhaps the disappointment of James and the others is a large part of the reason why Jesus was not honoured 'in his home town and in his own house' (Matt. 13:57) during his public ministry.

There is no other record of **James' response to Jesus and his ministry** until after the resurrection. In what seems to have been the next-to-last appearance before his ascension to heaven, the glorified Saviour was manifested to his half-brother (1 Cor. 15:7). It is quite likely that James' conversion was a result of that meeting, much as Paul's was later (1 Cor. 15:8; Acts 9:3–19).

Since none of Joseph's and Mary's other sons believed in Jesus during his pre-crucifixion ministry (John 7:5), it is very plausible that James led some (or all) of his brothers to faith in Christ after his own conversion. Though their mother's belief was apparently not decisive, the transformation in their brother, James, may have been. The mention of 'brothers' (plural) in Acts 1:14 in the Upper Room requires the conversion of at least two of Jesus' half-brothers. Almost certainly included would be James and Jude (Matt. 13:55; Jude 1), the brothers who contributed books to the NT.

The next mention of James is in Acts 12:17, after Peter was miraculously freed from prison by an angel (vv. 3–17). Peter asked those gathered for prayer to get word of what had happened to 'James and the brothers'. 'Brothers' almost certainly means the wider church in Jerusalem, thus the mention of James' name probably reflects his recognized leadership role in the church.

Two other inclusions of James' name in Acts underline his prominence as a leader in the Jerusalem church. At the Jerusalem Council, James was the last leader to speak, adding biblical support to the testimony of Peter (Acts 15:7–11) and Barnabas and Paul (v. 12). Since James' approach was essentially accepted word-for-word by the other leaders and the gathered church (vv. 13–29), he must have commanded great respect from all.

The final mention of James in Acts is at the conclusion of Paul's third missionary journey. When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he went to James and 'all the elders were present' (Acts 21:18). This wording again indicates that James was a leader of even higher station than the elders. Since the other apostles besides Paul were not referred to in Jerusalem in the book of Acts after the Jerusalem Council, the likelihood that James was, in effect, the ranking Christian leader in Jerusalem from that time forward until his death is fairly strong.

Most of the remaining **references to James in the NT outside of Acts** seem to fit into the time frame of the appearances of James in Acts. Probably the earliest of these are in Galatians, which most likely was written not long before the Jerusalem Council. In Gal.

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2:9 James, Peter and John are termed 'pillars' of the church. Paul's interaction with those leaders in Jerusalem was very positive, as they recognized his mission to the Gentiles (v. 9). However, at a later point, men claiming the authority of James came to Syrian Antioch and caused great dissension in that primarily Gentile church (v. 12). Since the visitors even managed to persuade Peter and Barnabas to assume certain legalistic practices (vv. 12–13), it is likely that the assumed influence of James was part of the Judaizers' revenge.

In 1 Cor. 9, Paul noted that **'the Lord's brothers'** were married (v. 5) and that their families were supported by the church financially (vv. 4–6). Surely James would be included in that phrase. The reference in 1 Cor. 15:7 to the appearance of the resurrected Christ to James is proof of that prominence.

The Epistle of James was almost certainly written by James, who grew up in the same household as Jesus, although he does not make mention of that relationship, but instead humbly calls himself 'a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ' (James 1:1). The reference to the OT, Christ's Sermon on the Mount, and prayer (James 4:2–3; 5:13–16) fit well both the scriptural picture and the strong extrabiblical tradition about James. Because the congregation of believers is called both 'synagogue' (James 2:2) and ecclesia ('church', James 5:14), the epistle may be one of the earliest NT writings, dating from a time in which the church in Jerusalem was still more of a messianic synagogue within Judaism than a clearly distinct religious grouping.

The final reference to James in the NT is in the first verse of **the short Epistle of Jude**. Jude, like James, calls himself 'a servant of Jesus Christ', but also goes on to bolster his authority as a writer of Scripture by the further description 'a brother of James' (v. 1). By that point in the apostolic era, the only James that could be named without further description is the Lord's younger half-brother.

Tradition holds that James was killed for his faith in the early 60s ad by the Jews. He is said to have been thrown from the roof of the Temple in Jerusalem, though this is not certain. The developing church lost a great leader and godly example when James died.

[Source: copied from New International Encyclopedia of Bible Characters accessed through Biblegateway.com 9-23-2024. No changes except added sub-titles for topics in the original text.]