

James, The Man

Who was this writer of the epistle that carries the name James? Most believe that he was the brother of the Lord Jesus, first bishop or overseer of the church in Jerusalem. History tells us that this James was called "James the Just," a man loved and respected by both Jews and believers. Legend has it that his knees were hardened and calloused like a camel's knees from his constant acts of worship and prayer.

For a minute, let's look at what we know about James, brother and bishop. First we see that Jesus did indeed have a brother named James: "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers **James**, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" (Matthew 13:55-56). From this we learn that Jesus' family were common folk, good Jews who worked hard and served God in keeping His covenant.

Once he started His public ministry, Jesus had strained relations with His family, as would be expected. We can assume that James was among those who struggled with Jesus' public ministry, for even Jesus said that a prophet is not without honor except in his own household (see Matthew 13:57). John wrote: "Jesus' brothers said to him, 'You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.' For even his own brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:3-5). On another occasion, we are told: "When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind'" (Mark 3:21).

We don't know for sure, but James may have been present with his mother at Jesus' death, since James appears to have been the oldest brother after Jesus. Perhaps he was present with Mary in the upper room as the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost but that is only conjecture.

But we do know that after His resurrection Jesus made a special visit to a man named James: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to **James**, then to all the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:3-7).

It is of note that Jesus appeared to this man by the name of James before He appeared to the apostles. Tradition tells us that Jesus revealed Himself to His brother at this time and James immediately became a believer.

James was the accepted leader of the Jerusalem church in Paul's eyes. Paul wrote in Galatians: "Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles-- only **James, the Lord's brother**" (Galatians 1:18-19); "**James**, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we

should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews: (Galatians 2:9) and “Before certain men came from **James**, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group” (Galatians 2:12).

At the great debate over what to do with Gentiles who were coming to faith in Christ, James had the last word, representative of his leadership role: “When they finished, **James** spoke up: ‘Brothers, listen to me’” (Acts 15:13). And listen they did, for they followed James’ recommendations completely and without change.

Tradition has it that James was martyred on or around 63 AD. At that time, the newly-appointed High Priest Ananus had James thrown from the pinnacle of the Temple. When he survived the fall, he was stoned and then clubbed to death. The citizens of Jerusalem were so outraged that they rioted and Rome deposed Annanus after being in office only three months.

It would make complete sense that this James, holy man and leader, would write the authoritative epistle credited to his name. With that in mind, let us now look at the epistle itself.

Study Questions

1. Read all the passages mentioned above to get a picture of James the man. What other insight do these verses give you about him?
2. Use your imagination and reflect what it must have been like to live with Jesus before and after His public ministry.
3. How did all this help to shape who James was and what he believed and taught?
4. Use your imagination again. What role did Mary have in all this? She would have been the main teacher and imparter of values to all her children. What does this say to you about the importance of being a parent?
5. James was a Jew of Jews. Reflect on the tension that would have existed between him and Paul, since Paul’s ministry was to the Gentiles.