

PEOPLE

James the Brother of Jesus

James the Just was another name for James the brother of Jesus. Information about his life is scarce and often very fuzzy. He is definitely identified as the “brother of Jesus” in the following passages:

- “Aren’t His brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas” (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). (James, Simon and Judas are not disciples by the same names.)
- “Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him 15 days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother” Galatians (1:18-19).

James’ being the brother of Jesus is also mentioned or alluded to in the following texts:

- “For even His brothers did not believe in Him” (John 7:5)
- “Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles” (1 Corinthians 15:7). Perhaps that was when James came to faith.
- “Mary the mother of Jesus and with His brothers” (Acts 1:14). This was when the followers of Jesus waited in Jerusalem before the Pentecost.
- “Tell James and the brothers about this” (Acts 12:16-17).
- James played a prominent role in the formulation of the council’s decision concerning circumcision and the Gentiles. (Acts 15:21)
- “James, Peter, and John...reputed to be pillars” (Galatians 2:9).
- “Paul and the rest of us went to see James” (Acts 21:18). This is a part of delivering the money Paul had collected from the Gentiles for the church at Jerusalem.
- “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James” (Jude 1)
- “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings” (James 1:1).

The other apostles remained in Jerusalem for a while, even during the early persecutions (Acts 8:1), but eventually they left for various missionary journeys. James appears to have stayed in Jerusalem his whole life. In time he came to be recognized as the head of the church in Jerusalem. The third-century church historian Eusebius even called James the “Bishop of Jerusalem.”

When James wrote his epistle, Mary was still in Jerusalem. It is probable that she made her home with James and was associated with the house congregation for which he was the pastor or elder. In many ways James’ epistle resembles Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. It is loaded with encouragement and filled with gems to help build Christian character.

In spite of James's strong loyalty to his Jewish heritage, he also was hated. Apparently the only thing sparing him for a fate similar to Paul's during those years was the protection of the Roman governor Festus. The Jewish-Roman historian of the first century, Flavius Josephus, wrote that after the death of Festus in A.D. 62, the Jewish high priest Annus II and the Sanhedrin had James stone to death. The new Roman governor, Albinus, was so outraged at this flagrantly illegal act that he had Annus deposed. Thus ended the ministry of James of Jerusalem, brother of our Lord.

Sources:

- James the Apostle of Faith – David P. Scaer
- People's Bible Commentary
- Wikipedia