

ST. JAMES

First Bishop of Jerusalem

by
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JAMES THE GREAT

To the Christian, and especially to one who is a conscious Israelite, the identity of James, First Bishop of Jerusalem, must be of absorbing interest.

There are, in the New Testament, three personages bearing the name James, the Greek form of the Hebrew name Jacob. The first of these to whom our attention is called was, with his brother John, a son of Zebedee and Salome, and known as James the Great, to distinguish him from another disciple of the same name. The appellation "great" was not bestowed upon him because of any inherent greatness in his character, but because he was a powerfully built man; we know that both James and John had powerful voices, for our Lord, at the very beginning of their discipleship named them Boanerges, "Sons of Thunder." Our Lord here uses the Hebrew idea of thunder, for the Israelite ever poetically interpreted thunder as "the voice of Jehovah" (Job XXXVI, 33, Ps. XVIII, 13, Isaiah XXX, 30). As the term "Sons of Thunder" was used in some countries to denote twins it would point to the truth of the assertion made by some students and also to a tradition that James and John were twins.

During the ministry of our Lord, James and John were seldom apart; they seemed to speak and act together (Luke IX, 54). They were witnesses of The Transfiguration, and appear to have been more constantly with our Lord than any of the other disciples, except perhaps Peter. Their firm belief in the Messiahship of their Lord emerged in their famous request to take precedence of the other disciples as Ministers of State in the coming Kingdom. Failing in their persistent seeking for a definite assurance on this point, they enlisted the services of their mother Salome^[1] to make the request. It is significant that our Lord did not answer the mother, but addressed His reply to her sons who were the instigators of it (Matt. XX, 22.-23). "To sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give but it shall be given unto them for whom it is prepared of my Father" (v. 23).

The brothers were strongly imbued with the Jewish national hope of deliverance from the power and rulership of Imperial Rome; not yet had they the true perspective of the Kingdom of God on earth.

James, as one of the twelve disciples, followed, with the others, his Master right up to the eve of His crucifixion; was present with them at the Last Supper and received a check to their ambition by the example of their Master in washing the feet of His disciples. After supper James heard His gracious words of admonition and comfort, yet in a matter of hours "they all forsook Him and fled" (Matt. XXVI, 56). The disciples, however, did not leave Jerusalem, for we learn

from John XVIII, 15, 16, that John and Peter came to the Judgment Hall of Pilate before the trial of their Master began. Of James there is no mention in this scene; he was, however, with the other disciples in Jerusalem on the morning of the resurrection (Luke XXVI, 9). During the forty days after the resurrection the risen Lord had been instructing James and the other disciples in "the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (Acts I, 3); then a few days before the Feast of Pentecost, or Feast of Weeks, the disciples went up to Jerusalem where their Lord made His last appearance to them, and delivered to them their commission to preach the doctrine of repentance and remission of sins; He afterwards led them on to the Mount of Olives as far as Bethany and, lifting up His hands, blessed them; in this action of blessing He was parted from them "in the midst of the day"; a shining cloud receiving Him out of their sight - this brilliant cloud compassed Him about and carried Him up to heaven. The cloud in which their Lord ascended was more bright and pure than the clearest flame, being none other than the Shekinah or glory of the Lord, the visible symbol of the Divine Presence which had so often appeared to the Patriarchs of old; which filled the Temple at its dedication, and which, in its greatest splendour cannot be beheld by mortal eye, for which reason it is called the light inaccessible in which the Almighty resides, and the effect upon the worshipping disciples "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke XXIV, 52).

Here at Jerusalem they gathered together day by day in "the upper room" - doubtless the room in the house of Joseph of Arimathea where the Last Supper took place, the doors being shut "for fear of the Jews," the same fear which caused the owner of the house to keep His faith in Jesus the Messiah a secret (John XIV, 38). Here not only James and the other Apostles, but an assembly of men and women who believed, foregathered day by day in supplication and prayer for the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Luke XXIV 29), the power which was to transform their lives into living and fearless witnesses to the power of the crucified and risen Christ.

After Pentecost the Apostles went forth in many directions with their dynamic message of the Gospel. Of the destination of James the Great there is some historical record. In the "History of the Jews of Spain" by Don Adolfo de Castro (translated by the Rev. Edward D. Kirwan, M.A., Fellow of King's College, Cambridge), there is included some correspondence between the President (or Ruler) of the Spanish Jews Synagogue of Toledo and the Spanish Jews Synagogue of Jerusalem in which the President of the latter states that a number of Jews are about to proceed from Jerusalem to Toledo who should not be received at Toledo, "or if ye receive any one let that one be James the son of Zebedee and none other; he is a good man." How long James the Great continued his missionary work in Spain amongst the Jews is not recorded; his work, however, must have left a deep and lasting impression for his name continues there to the present day. St. James the Great became the Patron Saint of Spain (Sant Iago). Some writers state that this son of Zebedee returned to Judea in A.D. 41; be that as it may he resumed his work there where his powerful physique and stentorian voice made him an outstanding figure amongst the Christians and a hated one amongst the Jews. Herod Agrippa, Governor of Judea, and grandson of the Herod who reigned at the time of the birth of our Lord, "set his hand to oppress certain of the Church, and killed James, the brother of John, with the sword" (Acts XII, 12) ; death by the sword was viewed as particularly ignominious."

This was a tragic blow to the infant Church, falling but nine years after the Lord's Ascension and took place during the fifth major persecution. James the Great is the only Apostle whose death is recorded in the Scriptures and the manner of it.

Sophronius, 7th century Patriarch of Jerusalem, states that after the Ascension of the Christ, this Apostle preached to those of the Jewish converts in Judea and Samaria who were dispersed after the stoning of Stephen. The officer who was his accuser before Herod and who guarded him to the tribunal, having been converted by the remarkable courage and constancy shown by James fell down at his feet begging pardon for what he had said against him, whereupon the officer publicly declared himself a Christian and both were beheaded at the same time.

Thus fell the disciple of our Lord and Apostle of the early Church, St. James the Great, the first of that number to gain the crown, taking cheerfully the cup of which he had long since told his Lord he was ready to drink (Matt. XX, 22).

JAMES THE LITTLE

Through an error in translation this disciple has become known as James the Less ; the appellation "little" was given in reference to stature and to distinguish him from the other James of more powerful build.

James the Little was the son of Cleophas and Mary; he is sometimes mentioned together with his brother Joses, the latter, however, though a believer, was not one of the chosen twelve disciples. James the Little is also designated "son of Alphaeus "; here is no contradiction for Alphaeus is not a personal name but a title of office and signifies Chief or Leader of a sect or political group among the Jews and his sons were known as sons of "the Chief." These sons were James the Little (Matt. X, 3), Joses (Mark XV, 40, 47), Levi (Mark II, 14). Cleophas otherwise Alphaeus, and his wife Mary were devoted followers of our Lord; Mary is said to have been a cousin of the Virgin Mary.^[2]

Of James the Little there is but scant record in the Scriptures. We know that he was present at the Last Supper and afterwards, with the other disciples, failed, for a short time, in loyalty to his Lord, "they all forsook Him and fled," remaining with them in the neighbourhood and was one of the "eleven" to whom was sent the message that "The Lord is risen indeed" (Luke XXIV, 9, 33, 34). James was present at the Ascension, and with the others was in the Upper Room at Pentecost. Beyond this we learn nothing from the Scriptures of his after movements. At Pentecost, having received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he was thus equipped for the fulfilling of the commission of his Lord and Master "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Luke XVI, 15).

That is the Roman world, the same world that was taxed by Caesar Augustus (Luke II, 1); in this "world" lost Israel was scattered; the lost sheep to whom our Lord declared he was expressly sent; the "other sheep" which our Lord also declared He must bring; the sheep who would "hear His voice" and respond to the Gospel message, and in due time carry the message to the most distant parts.

The last recorded mention of James the Little is, that as one of the eleven disciples, he was present at Pentecost (Acts 1, 13) ; afterwards all the disciples appear to have embarked upon preaching and disseminating the Gospel of the Kingdom as directed by the risen and ascended Christ.

There is, however, some notice of James the Little by early Christian writers; the 7th century Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (quoted by Godwin) states that James came to Sardinia in the Mediterranean as a missionary; from this point he appears to have gone to Spain.

James would be attracted to Spain to visit the several congregations of Jews in that country where these sons of Judah had been firmly established for many decades. It was probably these ancient Jewish settlements which determined St. Paul to visit Spain. "Whosoever I take my journey into Spain I will visit you." (Rom. XV,24,28)

Undoubtedly there were many communities of Jews not only in Spain but in the several islands; the Jewish envoys say to Caligula, the Roman Emperor (37 A.D.- 41) "all the more noted of the islands of the Mediterranean are full of Jews."

In the *Itinerary of the Spanish Jew*, Benjamin of Tudela who, in the twelfth century traveled in many lands to contact his fellow Jews and to ascertain their numbers found communities of his people in all the countries he visited.

There is a curious link between the Jews of ancient Spain and the Temple at Jerusalem. At the conquest of Spain by the Arabs, the Moslem general, Tarik, found near Toledo a rich precious table adorned with hyacinths (a blue stone of the ancients) and emeralds. Gelif Aledrio, in his description of Spain, calls this remarkable piece of antiquity "the table of Solomon, son of David." It is supposed to have been saved by the Jews, with other precious and sacred vessels from the pillage of the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar, and brought with those fugitives who found their way to Spain. Indeed some writers do not hesitate to assert that there is little doubt of this having been the original "table of shewbread" made by Solomon, spoken of in the Book of Kings and by Josephus, and which with the candlestick and altar of incense constituted the three wonders of the Temple." (These, most likely, were taken from Jerusalem at the same time as the stone in our Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey). "That table which Titus brought with him in his triumphal return to Rome was, clearly, not the same; for when the City and Temple, after the first destruction, were rebuilt by order of Cyrus, the sacred vessels were made anew, similar indeed to the old but of inferior excellence." (See "Lights and Shadows" by E. Wilson, p. 85).

This table, found by Tarik at Toledo, is surely in existence today, treasured perhaps in a European noble family, or in a Museum, to be given to the world one day as a link with the ancient past of Israel.

The death of James the Little and the manner of it is not recorded but that this Apostle ended his earthly life in Spain is certain from the fact that he lies buried at Ciudad Rodrigo, while his fellow Apostle James the Great was martyred and buried in Judea.

JAMES THE JUST

The third James in this study is known to New Testament readers as James, the Lord's brother. In early Christian literature as James the Just or the Righteous. The New Testament designation can be explained by a reference to ancient writers and by the circumstantial evidence of the Scriptures.

In circa 400 A.D. a Christian scholar, Jerome, traveled to Bethlehem in further pursuit of his studies and from Bethlehem his most important works were written. In one of these works (see *Life of St. James* by John Fleetwood, D.D.) it is stated that Joseph, who was afterwards the husband of the Virgin Mary, was first married to Escha, daughter of Haggi, brother of Zachariah, father of John the Baptist. There were four sons and several daughters of this marriage: the sons were James, Simon, Joses and Jude (Matt. XIII, 55). In Jerome's "Life of St. James the Just," he quotes from the lost Gospel of the Nazarenes, which is recorded in the "Gospel according to the Hebrews." This Gospel was extant and widely used during the first three centuries of the

Christian era; since then it has disappeared and is only known by the quotations in the writings of the early Fathers. It was treasured in the Church at Nazareth and was attributed to Matthew who appears to have obtained much of his material from our Lord's family. Jerome translated it and quotes from it.

James, the eldest son of Joseph and Escha, became a Nazarite; this Order had no connection with Nazareth; it was the most ancient Order in Israel (Numbers VI) and was open to both men and women. Its members were revered by the people as possessed of special sanctity. When the vow of a candidate for the Order was taken it could be for one month or as many months as the candidate decided upon, or he (or she) could take the Nazarite vow for life. The rules were of the strictest food regulations included abstinence from flesh food and total abstinence from wine and strong drink.^[3] The hours of each day were spent in prayer, fasting and study of the Scriptures in which they became expert in interpretation of the Law as laid down by Moses for the people of Israel. Nazariteship or separation unto God brings out strongly the priestly character of the people of the covenant. The Nazarite separated himself or herself unto the Lord. "Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire" (Lam. IV, 7).

After the death of Joseph, the foster-father of our Lord, his sons appear to have been active in support and care of the Virgin Mother. We obtain glimpses here and there of the family life of which Mary appears to have taken the headship after the death of Joseph.

When Mary's Divine Son returned to Palestine at the age of thirty after an absence of many years, to begin His ministry, hostility to His teaching and work was unmistakably displayed by both Jewish and Roman authorities. Mary feared for her Son's safety, especially when surrounded by the mob; on one occasion her stepsons accompanied her to a house where He was speaking to a crowd. Mary, wishing to get Him out to induce Him to return home, the sons effected a passage through the crowd to reach Jesus, but ere they achieved this our Lord was informed by one of His hearers standing close to Him "Thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to speak with Thee." Our Lord would not permit domestic ties, and a mother's anxiety for His safety to interfere with His Divine message in the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom and the healing of the sick. For the information of His listeners, and a studied reply to His mother and His brethren He uttered the memorable words "Who is my mother and who are my brethren?" And He stretched forth His hand towards His disciples and said: "Behold my mother and my brethren? For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt XII, 47-50).

Another domestic scene is revealed by John (VII, 1-13) where there appears to have been a family discussion concerning the journey to Jerusalem for the annual Feast of Tabernacles. Our Lord had announced his intention of going up to Jerusalem alone rather than in the family party. Whatever His brethren may have thought of Mary's Son as a good man and strict observer of the Law of Moses and His perfect obedience to the Scriptures, they did not believe that He was the Messiah. "For neither did His brethren believe in Him" (John VII, 5). And now almost tauntingly they say to Him "If you really are the Messiah why go up to Jerusalem secretly, why not go up openly and declare yourself Israel's Messiah?"

His reply yielded nothing to their argument, "My time is not yet, your time is always ready. I go not up yet." . . . But when His brethren were gone up, then went He up to the Feast, not openly, but as it were in secret" (John VII, 4, 5, 10). His brethren were not as yet to know that the day would come when they would lay all at His feet in contrition and wholehearted belief in His Divinity and Messiahship.

In this domestic scene we have the final mention of our Lord's brethren before they witnessed His sufferings and death on the Cross. At what stage in the Crucifixion drama and the Resurrection the brethren of our Lord came to a realization of the truth concerning Jesus and humbly bowed to Him as their long awaited Messiah we cannot tell; of one fact we are certain, the brethren were present in the Upper Room in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The first chapter of the Acts records the full list of the eleven disciples who were present in the Upper Room to which is added one of the most illuminating and precious statements in the Scriptures "With Mary the mother of Jesus and His brethren" (Acts I, 13, 14).

After Pentecost these "brethren" and the Apostles appear to have each become the leader of a group of converts which became the foundation of the early Church; each Church had its overseer who was known as the Bishop, who with his assistants were called "pillars of the Church" (Gal. II, 9).

With one accord the Apostles elected James the Just (or the Righteous) whom they continued to refer to as the Lord's brother, Bishop of Jerusalem. The Bishopric carried with it no territorial jurisdiction, until almost four hundred years later when Rome superimposed the Christian religion on the ancient Babylonian Paganism.

The choice of James the Just for the superintendence of the infant Church in Jerusalem rested on more than his reputed sanctity and new found zeal for the Gospel of Jesus the Christ ; in those days birth and lineage still loomed large in the mind of an Israelite, and from this point of view James the Just possessed the qualifications, for he was of the House of Aaron on his mother Escha's side, and of the House of David on his father Joseph's side. Joseph was of the Solomon line which was cursed in his ancestor Jeconiah (Jer. XXIII, 30), and so Joseph was debarred from the inheritance for himself and his descendants. Joseph, however, in legally adopting the Child Jesus (for the protection of both mother and Child) as his heir could bring Mary's Son, born in the Nathan line into the Solomon line, thus fulfilling the promise of the Angel to Mary "I will give unto Him the throne of His father David"; for the throne was vested in the Solomon line. Legal adoption in Israel made the adopted not one whit less a son than one born to him, and included the privileges and rights of an heir-at-law.

It was perfectly natural that these sons of Joseph should be referred to as the Lord's "brethren" ; the same term would apply today in a like domestic situation.

James the Just was, therefore, particularly acceptable to the Apostles from every point of view, and it is noteworthy that immediately they deferred to James as the elected head of the Church of Jerusalem, James presided at the first Council of the Church at Jerusalem.

St. Paul, three years after his conversion, went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and states "other of the Apostles saw I none save James the Lord's brother." St. Paul also states that the Lord was seen of James after His resurrection (I. Cor. XV, 7).

When Peter was miraculously released from prison he at once commanded "Go shew these things unto James and to the brethren" (Acts XII, 17).

The vexed question of circumcision, so vital a rite to every Jew and the uncircumcision of Gentilized Israel of the Ten Tribes known as Gentiles and as the "Dispersion" (John VII, 35) was the cause of much dissension among the Apostles to the great detriment of the infant Church; at length the matter was settled at a Council in Jerusalem presided over by James; the decision of the Bishop was final and accepted without murmur by all the Apostles (Acts XV); the vexed question was settled by the statesmanlike reasoning of James and the respect of all for his judgment and authority.

According to the most ancient authorities James filled the office of Bishop into extreme old age, enduring much hardship and persecution until at length the priests and the Jews at the instigation of Ananus the High Priest, James was led to one of the galleries of the Temple and cast on to the pavement beneath; he was not killed outright and was able to rise to his knees to pray for his murderers. It is recorded that James cried with a loud voice that Jesus was the Son of God and would quickly come to be their judge, whereupon a bystander with a fuller's club put an end to his sufferings. The martyrdom of James took place in 63 A.D., but seven years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. To the death of this just man some Jews ascribe the destruction of Jerusalem and their Temple. The Talmud ascribes a variety of miracles to James the Just.

It is noteworthy that after the martyrdom of James, the Apostles did not appoint one of their own number as his successor in the Bishopric, appointing Simon the brother of James to the vacant office. Nothing further is recorded of Simon it is, however, feasible that he obeyed his Lord's command "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies . . . flee to the mountains" (Luke XVI. 20, 21).

During the term of his Bishopric, and, it is believed, near the end of his long and holy life, James addressed his Epistle to the "twelve tribes scattered abroad." Many of the infant Churches were composed of Israel of the Ten Tribes who had become Gentilized and were known as Gentiles, many were converts to the Christian faith. James does not overlook their origin nor the declaration of his Lord and Master "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel" (Matt. XV, 24).

James does not refer to himself as an Apostle but with deep humility is content to subscribe himself "a servant of Jesus Christ," though worthy as any of the appellation "apostle."

The style of the Epistle is forcible, graphic and rich in figures. The main subject of the Epistle is the character and course of the true and consistent Christians, "the doer of the Word" who steadfastly "continues in the perfect law of liberty" as contrasted with the spirit and conduct of the mere professor. Consolation and encouragement under manifold trials are mixed with earnest exhortations to Christian virtue and to these are added warnings and reproofs to those who dishonoured the Christian religion by professions of faith without corresponding works. The Epistle strikingly resembles the teaching of our Lord especially in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. V). Nor is this surprising when we consider that James was a member of the household with our Lord and must have been very familiar with our Lord's expressions concerning the perfect way of life.

Notwithstanding the severity of the address in the Epistle, the result perhaps of Nazarite training, there is constant recurrence of the word "brethren."

There are fourteen allusions in the Epistle to the Sermon on the Mount; the sins denounced by James are precisely the sins which he had heard denounced by our Lord: unbelief, anger, hypocrisy, respect of persons, sins of speech, pride, covetousness; he exhorts to patience and prayer, and is the only Apostle who gives instruction about the sick.

Martin Luther utterly failed to understand the Epistle of James and pronounced it "a right strawy epistle." Luther objected to it on the ground of the contradiction which he assumed between Romans IV and James II, but there is no real contradiction, rather a deep harmony.

Jude in his Epistle introduces himself as "the servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James "; like James, Jude does not claim the position of an Apostle. Of the life of Jude we have no certain information. His descendants are mentioned by Eusebius who says that when Domitian ordered that all the posterity of David should be slain "some of the heretics accused the descendants of

Jude as the 'brother' of our Lord because they were of the family of David and as such were also related to Christ." He then refers to the good confession they made before their persecutors (Eccles. Hist. III, 20).

There is a marked resemblance between the Epistle of James and Jude; the object of both Epistles is similar.

Of Joses, the third son of Joseph and Escha, nothing is recorded concerning him in either sacred or secular history beyond that he with his brethren became a believer in the crucified and risen Christ and was present with the others at Pentecost. It is quite possible that Joses came to Britain with the other "Judean refugees" after the stoning of Stephen. for the name Joses is mentioned in the ancient records (see *The Coming of the Saints* by J. W. Taylor).^[4]

In the early Church James the Just was known and beloved for his irreproachable life and wise judgment, even his enemies bearing testimony to his strict observance of the Nazarite vow; the merging of this ancient Order into the Christian faith and charity was largely attributed to the life and example of James, First Bishop of Jerusalem, who with the other two personages of the same name made so vital a contribution to the Gospel story and the infant Church.

"They conquered him (the accuser) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they had to die for it but they did not cling to life. Rejoice for this O heavens and ye that dwell in them" (Rev. XII, 11, 12). Moffatt translation.

Footnotes:

[1] On Salome's role in the Early Church see essay *Salome: Matron Saint of Midwives*

[2] It has been suggested that "the Chief" may actually refer to the titular head of the House of David at that time, which would be either James the Lord's brother or Jesus Himself. In which case, some of the disciples may have been our Lord's sons, if not by issue, then certainly by levirate adoption. See *Biblical Terranomics #22* on "The Doctrine of Election". Available only to approved catechumens.

[3] Nowhere does the law of the Nazarite require vegetarianism, although by inference, it may be argued that the stipulation not to touch a dead body includes animal flesh.

[4] For a source for this book and other similar titles contact various BI groups