

James, the Brother of the Lord

I am so excited to be starting this journey with you. I have been deep in the pages of James in preparation for taking you with me back into the first century to introduce you to someone so very special in the eyes of our Lord Jesus. Family dynamics can be difficult at times, and certainly that had to be the case in the home of Mary and Joseph. How can anyone measure up to a perfect brother? Many of us have experienced the frustration of being compared to a sibling, and I think we can all agree that neither we nor our siblings are perfect. But that was not the case in one household in Nazareth where there truly was a perfect son and several not so perfect siblings. Just thinking about it makes my heart ache for not only Jesus and his siblings, but Mary and Joseph too, who had to watch that one-sided rivalry grow and fester in the hearts of some their children. While there is little scriptural evidence of that family relationship in the early years, scripture does record how those early rivalries matured right along with those young men¹. Our lesson for this week will focus on passages outside of the book of James allowing us to glimpse into the life of this family, and in particular to James.

Before we get started, let's first seek the Lord's blessing over our endeavors. *Lord Jesus, bless this child of yours in their studies this week. Open your scriptures and introduce us to your dear brother who has left us this wonderful and inspired book to study in the coming weeks. We want to know and understand him better as we study the words he's written, as well as, the record left behind concerning him by your faithful followers. Open our hearts and minds to understand what Living Faith truly requires. Above all, let us see what love does in living faith. —Amen.*



Read Matthew 13:54-58.

According to Matthew 13:55, list Jesus' siblings:

Why was Jesus unable to perform many miraculous deeds?

Why do you think so few in Nazareth believe that Jesus is the Holy one of God?

¹ I say "young men" in exclusion of the sister(s) of Jesus because the expectations of men and women of that age would have been very different. There was no equality or expectation of equality of the sexes in that day.

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The next passage we'll look at follows Jesus' Sermon on the Mount², as well as, a number of miraculous healings. In Matthew 8:1-4 (Mark 1:40-45) he heals a man with leprosy; Matthew 8:14-17 (Mark 1:29-34) he heals Peter's mother-in-law; and in Matthew 9:1-8 (Mark 2:1-12) Jesus heals a paralyzed man. This is just a few of the miraculous deeds Jesus did in the beginning to middle of his ministry. I purposely gave you the Mark reference for each of these miracles because our next scripture comes from Mark and I wanted to be sure to keep our timeline of Jesus' movements intact.

What does Mark 3:19-21 tell us of Jesus' return to Nazareth?

Then he went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind."

Mark 3:19-21



Why do you think Jesus' own family was not only unable to accept that Jesus was the Messiah, but believed him to be "out of his mind"?

The next verses show us a growing rift in Jesus' family. What does Jesus say regarding his family Mark 3:31-35?

What does this scripture reveal to us about the relationship between Jesus and his family?

In the listing of Jesus' siblings in Matthew 13:58 we find James listed first. Literary convention of the time would in all likelihood give precedence to the eldest son, making James the eldest of Jesus' siblings. We have no mention of Joseph (Mary's husband and father of Jesus' siblings) and can assume that he has passed on at this point elevating James to the status of head of the family. That being the case, when scriptures record the words of Jesus' brothers, we can take it to mean that James is the head of the family and likely the spokesman.

This next passage occurs after the Feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus' teaching on being the Bread of Life (John 6:1-59). Many of his followers found this teaching so difficult to accept that they stopped following him. Read John 6:60-68. Who still remains with Jesus and why?

² Found in Matthew chapters 5-7

John Chapter 5 tells us that before the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus had been in Jerusalem for one of the Feasts of the Jews where he healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (v.1-14). He draws the attention of the temple authorities. Jesus responds to them in John 5:19-30 essentially revealing to them that he is the Son of God, the Messiah. Read John 5:16-18. What do the Jews try to do to Jesus and for what reasons?

Next turn to John 7:1-9. Why does Jesus not want to go down to Jerusalem?

Why do his brothers tell him to go to Jerusalem?

What does verse 5 tell us?

Knowing the attitude of Jesus' brothers as revealed in the previous scriptures, and the fact that they are not counted among his followers, what do you think is the attitude of Jesus' brothers presented here?

We know that Jesus' mother Mary comes to be one of his faithful followers despite evidently some early concerns for his activities. By the time of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, she is one of the precious few who stand by him until the end. Before Jesus dies what does he say and do in this passage from John 19:26-27? What does this tell you about his relationship with his mother in light of what Jesus said earlier in Mark 3:33-35?

According to the ways of the world, who should Mary have been under the care of?

At this point what do you imagine is the relationship between James and Jesus?



Does it seem to you that Jesus has replaced his blood family with a spiritual family?

Personal reflection:

While relationships with our own families can be difficult and complex, what does the Body of Christ offer those whose own families do not see eye to eye in matters of faith? Have you ever been in a situation in your life where the body of Christ has filled the gap, so to speak, in providing a family for you?

A Revelation

In our previous homework section we finished with the scriptures surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and the blatantly obvious fact that while not only his disciples (save John and a handful of women), not a single one of his brothers were present. It is quite clear from scripture that they did not believe their brother could be the messiah, and had no clue what kind of Messiah he was. Their mocking words in John 7:1-9 reveal a level of contempt for the ministry of Jesus and their opinion of him. Make no mistake, they surely knew what happened to Jesus that fateful Passover. Most certainly they were in Jerusalem for Passover and to present themselves at the temple as required by Torah. Most certainly they knew of his arrest, were fearful for him, but did not stand beside him in fraternal loyalty. But before we become to judgmental of their harsh treatment toward Jesus, let us not forget that most of the disciples failed to stand beside their beloved teacher. Perhaps the absence of Jesus' brothers was more from fear of being associated with him, being arrested and nailed to a cross alongside their notorious brother.³ Romans took a dim view of revolutionaries and quite possibly would put an end to a family with a known revolutionary already convicted of treason.

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So if James didn't believe in Jesus as the Lord's Anointed, how did it come about that his writing is part of the sacred canon of inspired scripture? Well, that is what we will look at in today's scripture passages. Before we begin, let's take a few minutes to present ourselves before the Lord. *Lord Jesus, today we will be looking into the precious few verses that speak of James' conversion. Please open our hearts and minds to receiving the truth of this event and what it might mean to those who think it's too late to come to the Lord or that they've spent too much time denying him. Lord let us see that we can never do too much to be beyond your love and grace. – Amen.*



Read Acts 1:1-14, giving special attention to verses 12-14. Who was present in the upper room besides the disciples and Mary?

³ Remember, the charges the Jews brought against Jesus to the Roman authorities (and for which he was convicted) had nothing to do with religion and the kingdom of God. Rather in presenting Jesus before Pilate, the Religious leaders accuse him of attempting to lead an insurrection: "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king."Luke 23:2 (NRSV)

There is nothing in scripture to explain how it came about that Jesus' brothers came to faith and joined Jesus' followers, but there they are after the ascension waiting to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Verse 3 tells us that Jesus appeared to his followers for forty days, speaking about the kingdom of Heaven. Something truly remarkable had to have happened for James and the other brothers to have joined this band of followers. Paul gives us a hint as to what that might be.



Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. List in order to whom Jesus appeared.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

In his accounting, Paul left out one other to whom Jesus appeared, even before appearing to Peter. Read John 20:10-18. To who was it that Jesus appeared?

Jesus made a special and private appearance to only four people: Mary Magdalene, Peter, James and Paul. Nothing of the content of Jesus' private appearance to Peter is recorded, only his reinstatement and recommission to "feed my sheep" (John 21:15-20). Read the stories surrounding Mary Magdalene, Peter and Paul according to scriptures references below. Reflect on some of their actions/reactions to Jesus or his movement in the past. Reflect on what was necessary to reconcile them to the truth of who the Messiah truly is and who they would become upon coming to an understanding of that truth. I filled in the first one for you to give you an idea of what were looking for in these stories.

...and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

1 Corinthians 15:5-8

Individual	Misconception	Required for reconciliation	Who they became
Mary Magdalene	(Matt 27:45-61, Jn 20:9-14) She witnessed Jesus' horrific crucifixion. After seeing this most brutal and disfiguring of deaths, how could anyone survive? Did not understand that he would come back to life, saw only the physical evidence of an empty tomb, not understanding what it meant – that Jesus was alive as he said he would be	(Jn 20:16-17, Mark 16:9) She had to actually see and hear him before she could understand and believe that Jesus is alive, really alive. She had to see his risen physical body to believe that he is the living Messiah – anointed of God – he is neither a false messiah	(Jn 20:18, Matthew 28:8-10) She became known as the apostle to the apostles – Jesus sent her to tell them the good news that he was alive and would come to them. His appearing to her first underscores that it Jesus' eyes women are the equal of men in his

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Mary Magdalene (con't.)		nor false prophet. His resurrection proves that death is not the end and that there is eternal life. Mary's faith in him was not vain, his redemption of her from her past was forever, it did not end with his death.	estimation.
Peter	(Matt 26: 31-35;69-75)	(John 21:15-19, Matt 7:24-27)	(Matt 16:18; Gal 2:6-9)
Saul/Paul	(Acts 7:54-8:3; 9:1-2)	(Acts 9:3-16; 1 Cor 15:9-10; 9:1)	(Galatians 1:1; 2:6-9)
James	(Mark 3:19-21; John 7:1-9)	(1 Cor 15:7; Here you will have to do a little bit of speculating or inferring from what we do know)	(Acts 12:1-17;15:1-21;Galatians 2:9)

The Lord had huge plans for each of these individuals, but their faith was weakened not only by Jesus' death, but by their own insecurities and failings. If those insecurities and failings had been allowed to persist and grow, each one likely would have continued on into despair and, in the case of Saul, destruction. They each needed a personal savior. The Lord needed to redeem them and reconcile them with a fresh breath of truth and forgiveness. The Risen Jesus met each one in person in the midst of their lack of faith, lifted them up from their fall from grace, set them on the road to redemption, and a destiny of great work in establishing the church in the name of Jesus.



In a few concise words, summarize the false belief that caused each to stumble and fall:

Mary:

Peter:

Paul:

James:

Jesus was as close as a brother to many of his followers, especially the inner circle of disciples Peter, James (son of Zebedee) and John. But this James was the actual brother of Jesus. They grew up in the same household, mentored by the same (earthly) father loved by the same mother (adopted or not). Theirs was an intimate relationship battered and bruised over the years by frustration, anger, resentment, rivalry, jealousy and what was likely a difficult understanding (really, lack thereof) of Jesus' identity in the mind of James. Upon Jesus' death, James probably thought their relationship was dead, as well, with no possibility of reconciliation. For all the difficulties in their relationship, Jesus was his brother and surely there had been many wonderful memories from those early years. James probably thought all of that was gone and left in the place of that relationship was still confusion, frustration, remorse, resentment – a whole messy mix of emotions that James would have to deal with on his own – at least until the most improbable of moments when the risen Lord called his name, "James". Can you imagine the look of bug-eyed, slack-jawed astonishment on the face of that man?

Upon Jesus' death, James probably thought their relationship was dead, as well, with no possibility of reconciliation.

Describe how you imagine the scene played out.

Personal Reflection:

While scripture gives mention to only a small handful of personal appearances to his followers, each one of us requires one of those personal moments with our savior to put us on the path of everlasting life. Each one of us needs a personal savior far more than a public messiah. We need someone who knows our failings and sins, yet still wants to take us by the hand and restore us to a personal relationship with him. While you may never have experienced and appearance of the risen Lord in the same manner as Mary, Peter, Paul and James, how have you experienced a life changing encounter with your personal savior?

James the Pillar of the Jerusalem Church

Congratulations! You are nearly done with the first week's homework! I know our last segment was a doozy and we covered so much material. I hope you found it as fascinating as I did and that it gave you some good insight into the complex relationship between James and Jesus. Most of all I hope it gives you hope and encouragement that Jesus doesn't let anyone or anything die – he is not only the resurrection of eternal life, but also of relationships. With Jesus, it is never too late.

The scriptures that we will look at today will give us insight into who James became after that fateful day the Lord appeared to him. Boy, did the Lord have plans for him! We will be spending sometime in Acts as well as a few brief verses from some of Paul's writing. *Lord Jesus, help us begin to understand a bit of the man of God that James became laying a solid foundation for the study of his own epistle. Lord, bless us with understanding and insight as we spend time in your Word. –Amen.*



The first passage we will turn to is in Paul's letter to the Galatians where he records meeting with James twice. Turn to Galatians 1:11-19. Paul's conversion occurred in 35 AD.

According to v. 18, how long did Paul stay in Arabia before coming to Jerusalem, making it what year?

Who did Paul seek out?

Who else did he see?

If Paul didn't see anyone else, what can you glean from the fact that he saw only Peter and James, and not any of the other apostles?

Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother.

Gal 1:18-19

We will be looking at quite a few dates in our study today, so let's create a timeline to help keep things straight in our mind. Turn to the last page of this lesson where you will find the beginnings of a time line. On that timeline add Paul's visit recorded above and who he saw.



The next passage we will look at is the story of Peter's escape from prison recorded in Acts 12:1-17. (You might want to stick a book mark in Galatians, we'll be going back again later.) It is at the end of this story that we get a glimpse of James and where he fits in to the church. It is believed that this story takes place around 44 AD, approximately 15 years after the death and resurrection of the Lord. Read this story for context, and then answer the following questions.

What was King Herod⁴ doing at this time?

Why do you think he was doing this?

What has he done to James and Peter?

Which James is this?

Record this death on your timeline.

Now, jumping down to verse 17, to who are those assembled to relate all that Peter told them?

⁴ This was King Herod was Herod Agrippa I, the son of Aristobulus and grandson of Herod the Great. His sister was Herodias who was responsible for the death of John the Baptist. He was appointed ruler of most of Palestine including the territory of Galilee. He died suddenly in 44BC as recorded in Acts 12:19b-23 and by the historian Josephus. –NIV Life Application Bible Notes



Which James do you think this is referring to, and why?



Turn back to Galatians 2:1-10. (Now book mark Acts, we'll go back there again, too.) In verse 1 Paul tells us 14 years has passed. It is believed that the 14 years is counted from Paul's conversion in 35 AD. This passage would have taken place around 49 AD. Add this visit to your timeline. Read this passage and answer the following questions.

According to verses 2 and 9, who did Paul seek out privately?

According to the timeline, which James is Paul seeking out?

In verse 9, what phrase does he use to describe these three men?

What did they give Paul and what do you think it means?

... and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Gal 2:9

What was their instruction to Paul (v.9-10)?

The Galatians 2 passage is an important passage in understanding the position of James and the early church in Jerusalem. Paul points out that he is seeking the leaders privately, and among those leaders he identifies specifically Peter, James (the brother of the Lord) and John. At issue is Paul's ministry to the Gentiles and the support of the church in Jerusalem for Paul to continue his ministry. Paul needed the Jerusalem church to understand his ministry and give its approval. Paul received a special revelation from the risen Christ and a commission to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. If Paul's ministry was to be successful, and not tear apart the church, he needed the blessing of the Jerusalem church.

Peter had already reached out to the Gentiles in the conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10). Paul wanted to work with the Jerusalem church, not compete against it or overstep its authority. After all, the Gospel came from the Jews first. In this meeting Paul shared his missionary vision and sought the blessing of the Jerusalem Church. In response, we are told in verse 7 that James, Peter and John "saw that [Paul] had been entrusted with the task of preaching

the Gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews”. They recognized a level of equality in Paul’s mission to the Gentiles as being equal to Peter’s work with the Jews. They saw that both men were following the will of God in two separate, yet critical areas to upholding Jesus’ commission that the gospel be carried to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

In verse 9 they formally “*recognize the grace* given [Paul]” to pursue this ministry to the Gentiles. By extending Paul and Barnabus the “*right hand of fellowship*”, they gave their approval and support. All they asked in return was that they “remember the poor”. The poor to whom they were referring were the poor of Jerusalem. The believers in Jerusalem were under great persecution from the Romans and the Jewish leadership, as well as the effects of a famine in Palestine.



Finally we will look at another passage in Acts that records the Jerusalem Council of 50 AD. Read Acts 15:1-21 for context and then answer the following questions.

Briefly describe why Paul and Barnabus went to Jerusalem, and to whom were they presenting their case (v.6)?

Who defended Paul and Barnabus’ position (v.7)?

Who appears to be rendering the decision (consider the date of this event and the dates of the previous passages we studied today)?

Does anyone appear to dispute his authority? _____ What does this tell you of James’ position in the Jerusalem church?



From his statement (verse 13-18), decision (v19-21) and the letter that follows in verses 22-29, describe James’ understanding of faith, both in Christ and of Judaism.

By this point in the early history of the Christian church we see James as its primary leader. We saw Peter upon his escape from prison and subsequent plan to disappear for a time, hand the leadership of the small church to James. As the apostles traveled and carried the message of the gospel far and wide, James remained in Jerusalem watching over and building the church there. We see James emerge with wisdom and understanding (that can only come from God) at the Jerusalem Council as the chief among elders judging to what Laws the Gentile believers must adhere. And the decree issued upon that judgment was written to the churches of

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Asia with the authority that comes with wise and consistent leadership. That judgment and decree also reveals James' desire to unify the two sides of the church. We see him as an ally of Paul, but also striving to hold together the body of Christ in two distinct traditions without allowing one or the other to pull apart the infant church. While James recognizes God's grace upon the work of Paul as making it equal to the Apostle Peter's ministry to the Jews, we also can

James is a Christian Jew. The traditions of the Jews are part and parcel of who he is and he upholds those traditions among the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, Judea and beyond.

see that above all things James is a Christian Jew. The traditions of the Jews are part and parcel of who he is and he upholds those traditions among the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, Judea and beyond. James' own calling is to the Jews, and his God given message shines light on the "royal law found in scripture" (James 2:8). Rather than upholding the many pharisaic traditions and cleanliness laws which seem to define the faith of the more zealous believers (among the faction of the Judaizers) prominent in the Jerusalem Church that "neither [they] nor their fathers have been able to bear"

(Acts 15:10), James teaches a "perfect law that gives freedom" (James 1:25). As we launch into James' epistle we will come to understand this royal law. In James we see a love for the law that is beautiful and pure, not constraining or burdensome. While his letter was written to the Jews of the Diaspora, we will see that truly it is written for all followers of Christ, Jew and Gentile, first century and 21st century.

Before I end our lesson for this week, I want to leave you with one last image of this man of profound faith and wisdom. The wisdom of which we speak is not an earthly or worldly wisdom; it is the wisdom that comes with a deep and abiding relationship with God through prayer. The following quote is taken from Charles Swindoll's book, *New Testament Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter*:

Ancient historians tell us that James continued to live and teach in Jerusalem, convincing many Jews and visitors that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Greatly esteemed for his piety he spent so much time in the temple kneeling in prayer that he received the nickname "Camel Knees". Even his opponents, the scribes and Pharisees, could find no fault in him – except of course, his misguided belief in the messiahship of Jesus."