**“JAMES” SERIES**

**#1 – “Which James?”**

**SCRIPTURE:** James 1:1

***“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.”***

**INTRODUCTION:**

Today’s message answers the question, “Which James?” There are five men named James mentioned in the New Testament Scriptures. Why does it matter? It matters because one of them wrote this letter to the twelve Jewish tribe members scattered abroad. The other four didn’t.

***THE FIRST JAMES IS JAMES THE SON OF ZEBEDEE.***

He was one of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus. His father was a fisherman; his mother was named Salome, and, according to Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40-43, she often cared for Jesus’ daily needs.

James had a brother whose name was John and two other brothers, whose names were Peter and Andrew. All four were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee.

James is never mentioned in the New Testament apart from his brother John. Together, they were a spirited pair – they were called by Jesus Himself the “Sons of Thunder.”

James has the distinction of being the first to die for the faith. He was put to death by Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great sometime between A.D. 42-44. His martyrdom is the first one mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 12:2). Luke wrote that he was killed with a sword.

***THE SECOND JAMES I’LL MENTION IS JAMES THE SON OF ALPHAEUS.***

We don’t know much more about this James. Tradition says he was preaching in Egypt when he was crucified in the city of Ostrakine.

***THE THIRD JAMES IS JAMES THE LESS.***

He is thought to be the son of Mary – not Mary the mother of Jesus – but the Mary who was also the mother of Joses, according to Matthew 27:56, Mark 16:1, and Luke24:10. In Mark 15:40 he is referred to as “James the Less.” In Greek his name is James “mikros” (from which our English prefix “micro” is derived), which means either “the lesser James” or “the smaller James.” Take your pick.

***THE FOURTH JAMES IS JAMES THE FATHER OF JUDAS.***

This James is not the father of the Judas who betrayed Jesus. In fact, there were six men named Judas mentioned in the New Testament:

1. One of the four brothers (actually half-brothers) of Jesus, whom some scholars believe to be the writer of the New Testament letter of Jude.
2. One of the twelve apostles who was not Judas Iscariot and who is called Thaddeus by Mark (3:18) and Lebbaeus by Matthew (10:3). He was also called Judas the Zealot. He went to Assyria and Persia with the gospel message. Tradition says he was killed in Persia, the modern-day Iran.
3. The Judas of Galilee is mentioned in Acts 5:37. He was a Jewish revolutionary leader against Rome and was killed in battle during the time of the census mentioned in Luke 2:2.
4. The man with whom the apostle Paul roomed in Damascus after his conversion was named Judas, according to Acts 9:11.
5. A member of the church in Jerusalem was named Judas Barsabas. He and Silas were chosen by the apostles and the elders of that church to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their journey to Antioch to convey the decision of the Jerusalem Council about the circumcision of Gentiles.
6. Of course, there is Judas Iscariot.

This fourth James is mentioned only twice in the New Testament, both times as the father of the “good” apostle Judas (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13).

***THE FIFTH JAMES IS JAMES THE BROTHER OF JESUS.***

Actually, of course, he was a half-brother, one of four. Mary was his mother, but Joseph was his father. According to Scripture, he was the oldest of the four half-brothers of Jesus.

Something interesting is that the Roman Catholic Church teaches that Jesus didn’t have any half-brothers because Mary never had any children besides Jesus. They teach that Mary remained sexually pure because she and Joseph never had sex. They teach five key things about Mary:

1. She is designated “the Mother of God”;
2. She was a perpetual virgin (3rd and 4th century);
3. She herself was conceived without original sin, so she was immaculate (3rd and 4th century);
4. She was taken, body and soul, into heaven (1950, the Assumption of Mary);
5. She is a co-redemptrix (both she and Jesus are together our Savior).

Therefore, according to the Catholic Church, Jesus has no siblings. They claim that the four sons of Joseph were either adopted or were by a different mother. Another possibility, they say, is that they were “cousins” of Jesus.

But the truth is, Jesus had both half-brothers and half-sisters. Joseph had sons and daughters, and they had to come from his only wife, who was Mary (Matthew 1:25; 12:47; Luke 2:7; John 12:2; Acts 1:14).

James started out as a skeptic toward his older brother, according to John 7:2-5. He isn’t listed in the names of the apostles, nor is he mentioned in the gospels. But after the crucifixion and resurrection, he became a believer. Paul mentions him as a witness to the resurrection in 1st Corinthians 15:7. In Galatians 1:19 Paul refers to him as an apostle, but like himself, not one of the twelve.

Galatians 1:19 indicates that James was still in Jerusalem when the recently converted Saul arrived to meet with him and Peter. Several years later, when Peter escaped from prison, he reported to James about the miraculous manner of the escape ([Acts 12:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2012.17)). When the Jerusalem Council convened, James was the apparent chairman, according to [Acts 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2015.13) and [19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2015.19). He was also an elder of the church, called a “pillar” in [Galatians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%202.9). Later, James again presided over a meeting in Jerusalem, this time after Paul’s third missionary journey.

It's believed that James was martyred about A.D. 62, although there is no biblical record of his death.

So, this James is the author of the epistle of James, which he wrote somewhere between A.D. 50 and A.D. 60. He identifies himself by name but simply describes himself as “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” in the first verse. While he deals with some theology, he writes more about Christian ethics. Its theme is the outworking of faith—the external evidence of internal conversion.

James’ life provides some important lessons for us:

1. His conversion gives testimony to the overwhelming power that came from being a witness of Jesus’ resurrection. James turned from being a skeptic to a leader in the church based on his meeting the resurrected Christ.
2. James’ speech at the Jerusalem Council in [Acts 15:14-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2015.14-21) reveals his reliance on Scripture, his desire for peace within the church, his emphasis of grace over the law, and his care for Gentile believers, although he himself ministered almost exclusively to Jewish Christians.
3. Also worthy of note is James’ humility—he never uses his position as Jesus’ blood relative as a basis for authority. Rather, he portrays himself as a “servant” of Jesus, nothing more.
4. In short, James was a gracious leader through whom the church was richly blessed.

**CONCLUSION:**

*Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* has this interesting note about the letter of James:

“James addresses the epistle “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (1:1). This implies a readership of Jewish Christians living outside Palestine. Elsewhere in the epistle, however, James refers to hired field labor (5:4), and this locates his audience inside Palestine. In James’ day only in Palestine did farmers employ hired rather than slave labor, as was customary elsewhere.”

I hope you enjoy our short journey through the epistle of James.