



JAMES THE SON OF ALPHAEUS

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Nickname/Other:

James the son of Alphaeus (Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15; Ac 1:13)

James the Less - Greek *mikros* meaning small, least, less (Mk 15:40). This title is the commonly known name in church tradition. The word *less* should be understood to mean “little” or “younger.” Some Bible versions call him “James the Younger,” but the word may also imply smallness of stature or a lesser importance. Other than being listed as a disciple, nothing else is known about James the son of Alphaeus.

James the Younger – a non-canonical rendering for “less” considering that in this case it meant that there was an “older” James (the brother of John) and this Apostle being younger.

Sons of Alphaeus – We have two Apostles that had fathers by the same name, “Alphaeus.” Could Levi the publican, “Mathew son of Alphaeus” and “James the son of Alphaeus” be brothers or cousins? We do not know.

There is also another theory that “James the Less” and “James the brother of Jesus” are the same person. This is an insubstantial connection. We know through scripture that Jesus had half-brothers named James, Joses/Joseph, Judas and Simon (Mark 6:3 and Matthew 13:55). “James the Less” has a brother named Joseph (Mark 15:40). There are those that believe they are one in the same, however, this idea is widely dismissed.

General Information:

Hometown/Region: Unknown

Probably lived in Galilee of the Roman Province

Unknown trade

James, son of Alphaeus, was one of Jesus’ twelve apostles (Matthew 10:2–3) and one of three people named James mentioned in the New Testament. They are separated from each other by the name of the Father, Alphaeus. In the first century, people did not have last names as we do in Western cultures. Men

¹ Apostle St. James the Less, Museo de El Greco, Toledo

were often identified by their fathers and grandfathers. For example, the other James of the twelve apostles is described as “James the son of Zebedee” (Mark 3:17). A third James mentioned in Scripture was the brother of the Lord Jesus (Galatians 1:19), a leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; Galatians 2:9), and the author of the book of James.

Family:

James father was Alphaeus. (Mt 10:3; Mk 2:14; 3:18; Lk 6:15; Ac 1:13)

James mother was Mary of Clopas (Jn 19:25) Some scholars believe that James’ father, Alphaeus, is the same man called Clopas, the husband of Mary, in John 19:25. There is no way to be sure one way or the other.

Therefore, is Clopas another name for Alphaeus?

Tradition claims that this James the Less is the brother of Jesus (cousin). There is much debate on this point.

MINISTRY INFORMATION:

Major Accomplishments during Jesus’ Ministry:

Was an eyewitness of Jesus’ baptism, ministry, and resurrection, and followed Christ for about three years

Present for the baptism of Jesus (Mt 3:13-16; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-23) in accordance with Acts 1:21-23

While we do not have James calling by Christ in the Bible, James left everything to follow Jesus.

James was one of twelve Apostles Jesus Called (Matthew 10:2–4, Mark 3:14–19, Luke 6:13–16, and Acts 1:13–16).

The only place we find “James son of Alphaeus” is in the four lists of Apostles.

Sent out by Jesus to preach “the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand”, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and cast out demons (Mt 10:1-42; Mk 6:7-13; Lk 9:1-10)

Was with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:39-46; Jn 18:1)

Like the others, he deserted Jesus during Jesus’ trials and crucifixion.

Major Accomplishments after Jesus’ Ministry:

Hiding for fear of the Jews (Jn 20:19)

While waiting on Jesus at the sea of Tiberias, James the Less may have been present when the disciples went fishing as “two others.” (Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, and John, and two others, Jn 21:2) If so, he would have witnessed the miraculous catch of fish (Jn 21:2-7)

Listed in the upper room with Peter, James, John, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Mt, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon Zelotes and Judas the brother of James. (Ac 1:13)

Was present when Jesus appeared after his resurrection (Jn 20:19-25)

Was present at the choosing of Mathias to replace Judas (Ac 1:10-14)

Present in the upper room at Pentecost (Ac 2:1)

Totally changed after Pentecost

Was present when Jesus gave the Great Commission (Mt 28:16-20)

Was present when Jesus was taken up to heaven (Ac 1:8-9)

Manner of Death:

We have no record of James's birth or death. He lived during the time of Jesus, 4-33 AD.

Traditionally, James was martyred by crucifixion in Persia (modern Iran) or Sinai. Others say that he was stoned to death in the streets of Jerusalem.

Writings

No writings, canonical or noncanonical, are attributed to James the son of Alphaeus

Scripture References:

Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:14-19, 15:40; Luke 6:13-16, and Acts 1:13-16

Strongest Character Traits:

1. Unknown
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

James the son of Alphaeus is a very clear picture of an Apostle of Jesus Christ who lived his life in unknown, humble service to his Master. This little-known apostle is a great lesson for Christian brothers and sisters today. James was called by Christ from a disciple to a follower and finally as an Apostle. He held the same position and stature of the other, more known Apostles (Peter, James, John, Andrew, Matthew) but nothing is known of his deeds as an Apostle. Even so, he will sit on the throne of Jesus during His earthly reign. He will have the same authority as the other Apostles. His name will be engraved on the walls of the New Jerusalem at its appearance (Revelation 21:14). He will forever be an Apostle of Jesus Christ. He will forever be with Jesus.

That should give each of us great comfort. Do the task set before us by Christ. Let Jesus lift you up in the sight of men.

NOTES:

There is some thought that James was part of the group called the Zealots².

² The Zealots were a militant political movement in 1st century Judea. They taught and tried to incite the people of Judea to overthrow the Roman government and expel them from the land of promise.