

## How Many Jameses? By Elder David Pyles

Many Bible believers think there are three men named James in the New Testament. One was James the son of Zebedee, who was of the original apostles and brother to the Apostle John. The second was James the son of Alphaeus, who was also one of the original apostles. The third is supposedly James “*the Lord’s brother*” (Gal 1:19), who is thought to be a son of Mary begotten after the virgin birth of Jesus, though some speculate he was a son of Joseph by a previous marriage. I have always been skeptical of these ideas.

The evidence says to me that “*brother*” in Galatians 1:19 means “kinsman,” and likely refers to a cousin, and that this cousin was simply James Alphaeus of the original 12 apostles. This would mean that there are only two men named James in the New Testament.

Evidence for this commences with a proper identification of Jude, the author of the New Testament book by the same name. This Jude claimed himself to be the brother of James (Jude 1). Most Bible scholars believe that “Jude” was a contracted form of “Judas” and that the new name was chosen to distinguish him from the infamous Judas Iscariot. Now this Jude or Judas was very likely one of the apostles, as can be seen in:

*And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor. – Lk 6:13-16*

*And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. – Acts 1:13*

Hence, there was second apostle named Judas and he was also brother to James Alphaeus. There is no better theory than that Jude was this Judas who was listed among the 11 faithful apostles.

Incidentally, in the list of apostles provided by Matthew (Mt 10:2-4), there was a man named Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; however, nothing was said of any Judas other than Judas Iscariot. The best conclusion here is that Lebbaeus and Judas were alternate names of the same man. This reflects a fact that clearly pertained to that society, namely, that people commonly went by multiples names (e.g. Peter versus Simon, Saul versus Paul, etc.).

Having established the likely identity of Jude, I will next move to the identity of the James who is called the Lord's brother in Galatians 1:19. Now Matthew told us that the Jews took a low view of Jesus because of his humble origins and family. These Jews said:

*Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? – Mt 13:55*

So Jesus had “*brethren*” that included a James and a Judas. As I have already indicated, the word “*brethren*” is best taken to mean kinsmen, and likely refers to cousins. If Mary herself had such a large number of children after Jesus, then we would have expected the Bible to be clearer about this. An even greater problem is that while Jesus was dying on the cross, He verbally committed the care of His mother to John the apostle (Jn 19:26-27). Why would He have done this if she had so many other children to care for her, particularly when at least one of these children (i.e. the presumed James) was a faithful Christian? Judging from Psalm 69:8 and John 7:1-8, the more likely theory is that Mary did have a few children after Jesus; however, they were not believers, and this is why Jesus committed her to the care of John.

So the evidence thus far indicates that James and Judas, sons of Alphaeus, were both apostles and both brethren of Jesus in the sense of being His cousins. This is further corroborated by comparing the following two scriptures:

*Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. – Jn 19:25*

*And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children. – Mt 27:55-56*

The first scripture indicates that Mary, mother of Jesus, had a sister who was also named Mary. It would be strange to have sisters going by the same name, but these were likely sisters-in-law. We know that “Mary” was a favored name in those times because at least three women by such name were observers of the crucifixion (adding Mary Magdalene). Now the next scripture suggests this same Mary was mother of James and Joses, both of which names were used earlier (Mt 13:55) when listing “*brethren*” of Jesus Christ, though it is here suggested they were actually cousins.

Now if Cleophas was an alternate name of Alphaeus, then the evidence clearly favors the idea that James, the Lord’s brother, was actually none other than James Alphaeus of the original apostles. This conclusion is supported by the fact that James, the Lord’s brother, was indeed called an apostle in Galatians 1:19. John Gill, in his comments on John 19:25, gives strong argument that “Cleophas” and “Alphaeus” were in fact variations of the same name in the Hebrew language. This seems to be a much more plausible solution than to hatch up a 13<sup>th</sup> apostle named James who was nowhere ordained or authorized in scripture.

These conclusions are also indicated by the book of Acts. Though Luke, the assumed author of the book, was one of the most talented writers of the New Testament, the three-James view implicitly charges him with careless communication. Luke identified two apostles named James in his first chapter (Acts 1:13). One was the brother of John and son of Zebedee. The other was the son of Alphaeus. Luke reported that the son of Zebedee was killed by Herod in Acts 12:2. Luke thereafter referred to a living James in Acts 12:17, 15:13 and 21:18, but said nothing to indicate that he was introducing a new character by such name. The natural assumption would therefore be that the James mentioned in the

later verses was the same with the remaining James he had already introduced, which could only mean James Alphaeus. Now this James was almost surely the one to which Paul referred as being the Lord's brother.

The upshot is that the evidence says there are two men by the name of James in the New Testament, not three. Both were of the original 12 apostles. James Alphaeus was a cousin to Jesus, and therefore called his "*brother*" in Galatian 1:19. A plausible theory is that Alphaeus was brother to Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus.

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