

## **“They’re Real People! — James”**

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**Acts 15:12-21**

<sup>12</sup> And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. <sup>13</sup> After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. <sup>14</sup> Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. <sup>15</sup> And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

<sup>16</sup> “ ‘After this I will return,  
and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen;

I will rebuild its ruins,  
and I will restore it,

<sup>17</sup> that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord,  
and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,

says the Lord, who makes these things <sup>18</sup>known from of old.’ [Amos 9:11-12; Isaiah 45:21]

<sup>19</sup> Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, <sup>20</sup> but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. <sup>21</sup> For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.” [ESV]

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We cannot but notice a significant change, a miraculous transformation, in the life of this man called “James.” Like Theophilus and Nicodemus, he was well-known in Jerusalem in the 1st century of this era.

We first meet him in Nazareth.

“...coming to His hometown He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And are not His brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all His sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?’ And they took offense at Him.” [Matthew 13:54-56; Mark 6:1-3]

James was one of four brothers of Jesus of Nazareth. Apparently he was living in Nazareth at the time Jesus returned and spoke in His home synagogue. However, what was it that offended His hometown people?

Luke adds more details to the story:

“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and He stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’

And He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’

“And all spoke well of Him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth.

“And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”

“And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.”

“And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”

“When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove Him out of the town and brought Him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went away.” [Luke 4:16-30]

Everything was going very well, until Jesus suggested that what He was doing was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Moreover, they viewed Jesus’ activities as some sort of magic road show — “What you did in Capernaum, do here, too.”

So where were Jesus’ brothers in this melée? Apparently they were a part of the crowd which was about to toss Jesus over a cliff. This suggests that there were mixed emotions about Jesus harbored in the hearts of His brothers.

Apparently His brothers had been with Him in Capernaum. Prior to that, they had witnessed Him turning jugs of water into jugs of fine wine during the wedding feast in Cana.

“After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.” [John 2:12]

It is John who verifies their doubts.

“Now the Jews’ Feast of Booths [Sukkoth] was at hand. So His brothers said to Him, ‘Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.’ *For not even his brothers believed in him...* But after His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He also went up, not publicly but in private.” [John 7:2-5, 10]

His brothers were often in the crowds that followed Jesus. Their inability to get close to Him, however, was a source of frustration for them, especially when He gave priority to the crowds and not to them.

“While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him.” [Matthew 12:46]

“And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, ‘Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.’” [Mark 2:31-32]

At one point, as they were listening to Jesus, they even declared that He was insane:

“And when His family heard it, they went out to seize Him, for they were saying, ‘*He is out of His mind.*’” [Mark 3:21; compare with John 10:20]

However, the unbelief of His brothers was not permanent. Something happened that totally changed their minds. Every one of them became a disciple, with two of them — James and Jude — writing letters which became a permanent part of the New Testament. Simon, the youngest of Jesus’ brothers, was the last of the eye-witness of Jesus to die, about 110 A.D. He was, apparently, the same age as the Apostle John, who also died about that same time.

What was it that turned their lives around? Paul who tells us, listing the eyewitnesses to the Risen Jesus —

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. *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 15:3-8]

That had to be a most singular, startling, life-changing moment. James was present at Christ’s

crucifixion. He saw his crazy brother die. Then, suddenly — there He was, back again! The next time we see James, he is the leader of the fledgling Messianic Movement, called ‘The Way’ in his day, and “Christians” later in Antioch.

Paul met James, after his own conversion after seeing the exalted Jesus. In his autobiography recorded in his *Epistle to the Galatians*, Paul wrote —

“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except *James the Lord’s brother*.” [Galatians 1:18-19]

Paul met James again fourteen years later; this time, James, with the Apostle Peter and the Apostle John, participated in the ordination of Paul and Barnabas as Apostles to the Gentiles —

“...when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” [Galatians 2:9-10]

Unfortunately, not everything went well between Paul, Peter and James. The city of Antioch in Syria had become the staging area for mission outreach to the Gentiles of Asia, Greece, and Rome.

One day, James sent a party of *inspectors* to Antioch to see what was happening there. Peter, who “before certain men came from James...was eating with the Gentiles,” when he saw the *inspectors* from James, “he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.” Paul confronted him over this blatant hypocrisy. [Galatians 2:11-14]. “God has made of the two *one new person*.” [Ephesians 2:14-16]

James wisely figured out the significance of what was happening in Asia. At the *First Ecumenical Council of the Christian Church*, it was James *himself* who defended the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the One Body of Christ.

“Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,...” [Acts 15:19]

The only strictures James imposed upon the Gentile believers were the seven laws of Noah which the Torah applied to all nations!

The last time we see James is in the writings of Josephus. From him we learn that James was highly respected by the citizens of Jerusalem. However, Annas, the High Priest, son of Annas, brother of Theophilus, brother-in-law of Caiaphas, accused James before the Sanhedrin of breaking the law, had him stoned in A.D. 62. This infuriated the community, who then had Annas deposed and replaced. [Josephus, *Antiquities*, XX, 9.]

We have two books written by two of Jesus’ brothers: The Epistle of James, and the Epistle of Jude. These brothers went from derision to discipleship in the glory of the Risen Lord Jesus.