

JAMES

James is the third disciple in the list, - he follows after Peter and Andrew. He is the brother of John, and the son of Zebedee ... from another fishing family.

In two of the lists of the disciples his name comes after Peter ...

- **Mk. 3:16** And Simon he surnamed Peter; **17** And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder: **18** And Andrew
- **Acts 1:13** And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew

Also, in the remaining two lists, where the two names of the brothers are mentioned, James precedes John, which would indicate he was the older and the more dominant of the two.

- **Mt. 10:2** Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother
- **Lk. 6:14** Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John,

Another observation is that James never appears in the Gospels apart from John. In other words, we don't have any information about James without John. They are inseparable, but James is always to the fore.

They had people working for them, **Mk. 1:20** And straightway he [*Jesus*] called them [*James and John*]: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him. They were also privileged to be among the first 'group' to be called into the disciple band.

In addition, we mentioned previously 'the four' who were closest to Jesus, - Peter, Andrew, James and John. Well, James, - along with Peter and John, - belonged to the three who were closest to Jesus. These three, for example, were with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1), and at one of the most poignant stages in the Garden of Gethsemane, **Mk. 14:33** And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy.

The significance of James as a disciple is indicated by the name Jesus gave him and his brother, Jesus called them 'Boanerges', 'sons of thunder' (Aramaic, *ben* ... and *regaz*, rage). By virtue of such a description, Jesus recognised him as a fiery, passionate, zealous individual. ... Actually, he would have been quite the opposite of Andrew ... Andrew would have been

bringing people to Jesus whereas James would have been more apt to drive them away! That was the type of personality he had ... and Jesus had both varieties in His disciple band.

Sometimes, though, his zeal was less than righteous and not at all helpful ... like, for example, [Lk. 9:51](#) And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, [52](#) And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. [53](#) And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. [54](#) And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? ... Let's burn them to smithereens!

On this occasion Jesus is on His way up to Jerusalem for His final Passover. They are coming down from Galilee and passing through Samaria. He would have liked to have stayed there but the Samaritans didn't want Him ... Him being a Jew. So, James and John, - not very graciously, - suggested the Lord should rain down a fiery judgment on the village, [Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?](#) ... hence the nickname, 'the sons of thunder'. James and his brother were infuriated! ... 'Burn the place down' was their attitude!

Imagine the Lord calling characters like this into His service! Andrew would have tried to bring them to Christ ... James had a completely opposite view. Nonetheless, James also was called of the Lord. So Jesus rebuked them, [55](#) [Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.](#) ... You have a bad attitude! ... [56](#) [For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.](#)

So their attitude needed working on! ... I mentioned already how Jesus recognised James as fiery, passionate, and zealous ... well, insensitivity was another of his characteristics! ... It is good though that Jesus did not send him and his brother back to Galilee and replace them. He kept them on because the Saviour had chosen them knowing what they were like and how He was going to change and use them in His greater plan. God doesn't make mistakes with the people He chooses!

Another indication of James' personality is given in Mt. 20. This time it relates to his ambition, [20](#) [Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. They sent for their](#)

mother to come and ask Jesus a question, ²¹ And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. ... She didn't make a request, i.e. would You please ...? ... No, she made it more as a directive, *Grant [Εἰπέ, verb imperative aorist active 2nd person singular from λέγω, "Make a decision and promise here and now ...] that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom ... do it!*

With an overbearing wife like that, Zebedee probably looked forward to being out in his fishing boat for all those long hours! ☺ ... She was telling Jesus, - in no uncertain terms that when He set up His Kingdom, her two boys were to be sitting ruling on either side of Him!

That is how bold she was! ... ²² But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him [*with a heavy dose of blind self-confidence*], We are able. ... Mrs. Zebedee and her two sons didn't know what they were talking about and what they were asking for, for they did not realise the *massive* demands such privilege would require, ²³ And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. Now, Jesus had already explained *this* to them, in answer to Peter's question in the previous chapter, **Mt. 19:27** Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? ²⁸ And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ... There will be seats of prominence in the Kingdom, but the distribution, - in terms of rank and hierarchy, - will be granted by the Father alone.

So, this was a potential thorny issue, **Mt. 20:24** And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. ... Now everybody is in a bad mood because of these two, and their aspirations of worldly ambition ... to be in higher positions than the rest! ...

By the way, 'Mrs.' Zebedee is identified by some as the Salome who stood by the cross of Jesus (Mk. 15:40), and who also accompanied her to the tomb on resurrection morning (Mk. 16:1).

The final mention we have concerning James is in Acts 12, ¹ Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. ² And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. ³ And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. ... There's the three again, - Peter, James, and John.

Many people are being saved. The Gospel is changing the landscape and Herod was persecuting the church. In particular, he put James to death. ... He didn't choose to kill John first, or Peter first ... but James. Why? ... Peter was the great preacher of the first twelve chapters of Acts, and John was the companion of Peter in the earliest days of the church ... but it was James Herod decided to kill ... Why?!

Somewhere during the process of James following the Lord God's grace changed him from everything he was before into being empowered by the Holy Spirit as a man whose zeal and ambition was for the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ alone, - we also see something of this development in his epistle. The Holy Spirit turned this 'son of thunder' into a mighty force for God. He learned to control his temper, to place a guard over his tongue, to redirect his zeal, to eradicate his personal ambition, and to eliminate his desire for revenge. ... God turned him around and changed him into a man of passion for the Gospel to the point where he *did* drink that cup of which Jesus referred to in [Mt. 20:23](#) And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with.

His life was short for Herod killed him with the sword, shortly before the day of Passover, in the year 44 AD. According to the historian Eusebius, who quoted from Clement of Alexandria, who claims to have relayed the story from those who were there ... the accuser who led James to be executed was so moved by James' dedication and love for the Lord, that he, - the accuser, - became a Christian, and was martyred alongside James.

There is no doubt about it, - James was passionate. At the beginning, his passions were often misdirected, but when the Lord set to working on him he became one of the mighty pillars of the Church. ... God 'harnessed' him! When others would have dismissed him, God worked on him because God knew what he would become. ... None of us can claim to be 'the finished project' because we are very much 'a work in progress'.

God calls his 'Peters', His 'Andrews', and His James' ... and He has a purpose for each and every one of them. It is His purpose for us to work together for His glory, for the sowing of the Gospel, and for the edifying of His people.

James is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament Jacob ... and Jacob was a 'supplanter', a 'double-dealer' ... someone you had to watch. And yet, what a mighty man of God Jacob, - Israel, - turned out to be. As Isaiah declared, **Is. 64:8** But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. ... Paul takes up this illustration and applies it, **Rom. 9:21** Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? God can make out of us what He so desires. May it, therefore, be, - as it was with James, - that He will work out in us His will, for His glory's sake! Amen.