

JAMES

We are coming to the last four of the disciples, - James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot.

There are three prominent men called James in the New Testament, - James the disciple/apostle (the son of Zebedee and brother of John), James who wrote the epistle (he is considered by many commentators to be James, the Lord's brother [*i.e. half-brother*] mentioned in Gal. 1:19, and one of the leaders in the early church in Jerusalem), and James, the son of Alphaeus... about whom we are given very little information.

The name 'James' (Ἰάκωβος) comes from the Hebrew name 'Jacob' (יַעֲקֹב *Ya'aqob*) meaning 'supplanter'. A 'supplanter' is one who takes over or takes the place of someone else ... often by dubious means. For example, the Jacobite Rebellion was an attempt in Great Britain and Ireland by the Roman Catholic James (VII of Scotland and II of England and Ireland) to supplant the throne from the rightful king, the Protestant William of Orange. 'James' in the Latin is 'Jacobus', hence 'Jacobite' ...

In the Bible, Jacob was one of the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah, **Gen. 25:20** And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian. **21** And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. **22** And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. **23** And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. **24** And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. **25** And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. **26** And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them. **27** And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. ... Rather than going out hunting and 'living it rough', Jacob preferred to stay at home and adapt an easier lifestyle. ... The story continues, **29** And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: **30** And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. **31** And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. **32** And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? **33** And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his

birthright unto Jacob. ... Jacob ‘supplanted’ Esau’s birthright, - Jacob took his brother’s inheritance by taking advantage of his brother’s need.

So, that is where James’ name came from ... from one of the Patriarchs of the nation of Israel. Therefore, it was a very special name and an honourable among the Jews.

To distinguish this present James from the others he is always identified as the son of Alphaeus ... Alphaeus also comes from a Hebrew word that means ‘changing’, ‘exchange’ ...

Mt. 10:3 ... Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus

Mk. 3:18 ... Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus

Lk. 6:15 ... Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus

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, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus.

... Notice how Matthew and James are next to each other in Matthew’s Gospel and the Book of Acts ... and in both the Gospels of Mark and Luke Thomas is placed in between them. I mention that because Mark also tells us, **Mk. 2:14** And as he [*Jesus*] passed by, he saw Levi *the son of Alphaeus* sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him. ... Obviously this person Alphaeus was well-known among the early Christians, and there is no attempt to indicate these were two *different* men called Alphaeus ... Consequently, this could well suggest *Alphaeus* had one son called Levi (Matthew) and another son called James ... two brothers Jesus called to be disciples ... just as He had called brothers James and John, and brothers Peter and Andrew.

For sure, though, Alphaeus was the father of this James ... Then when we turn to Mk. 15:40 we see something else that is very interesting for there is a strong probability we find James’ mother, *There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less* ... The description of ‘James the Less’ was obviously referring to someone well-known in Christian circles ... and most commentators would identify ‘James the Less’ (μικρός) as being the name, - the nickname, - used to identify him from James the brother of John and James the half-brother of Jesus, both of whom would have had the more prominent profiles.

It was not in any way a derogatory title or an attempt to relegate him into a lower class of disciple but simply it illustrates he was not as much to the fore as the two other James. He was more of a background person.

Then, in John's Gospel we read, **19:25** Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene ... Once again, we have two Marys, - Mary Magdalene ... and Mary who was the wife of Cleophas. Whereas Alphaeus was the Hebrew name meaning 'exchange', *Cleophas* is the same name but in Aramaic ... and it also means 'exchange' ... and Jn. 19:25 is the only place it is used in Scripture. So, in Mk. 15:40 we are told, *There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less, and in Jn. 19:25 we are also told, Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.* In the one she is described as the mother of James, and in the other she is described as the wife of Alphaeus/Cleophas. ... It is very probably the same woman?

Basically, though, that is as much as the New Testament tells us about this James. ... However, at the same time, what can be safely deduced about him? He was involved in the Lord's work ... not at the front ... but He was there, for example, with Jesus during the Sermon on the Mount, during the Saviour's ministry throughout Galilee, Judea, and all the surrounding districts. He was sent out in mission and entrusted with the work of the Lord. He did not show any outstanding leadership qualities, and neither did he ask any deep questions nor have any profound conversations with Jesus that made it into any of the Gospels. He wrote none of the epistles. He simply and quietly and conscientiously 'got on with the task' of serving Jesus. ... That was it!

How do we know he didn't misbehave? How do we know he didn't connive with Judas Iscariot? How do we know he didn't do something he ought not to have done? How do we know he wasn't a lazy and ineffective disciple? ... Well, we know because if he had done any of those things Scripture would have recorded it ... so therefore, he 'kept his sheet clean' and simply and faithfully served the Lord Jesus ... Basically that is as much as we know about him from the Biblical records.

Imagine how the conversation would have gone in the streets and roadways of Galilee... Who is that 'James' again? ... Oh, he is the son of Alphaeus ... You all know Alphaeus, well, that's his son, James. He didn't stand out much

in the crowd, - he was ‘the lesser’, - and yet the Lord gave him the privilege of being called to become one of the twelve disciples.

... Who’s he again?! ... People don’t need to know all about us. They don’t even need to have heard of us, in order for us to serve Christ faithfully, **Jn. 3:30** **He must increase, but I must decrease.** In fact, the less they know about us, the better ... because the more they ought to know about Jesus through us. ... The Lord knew James the son of Alphaeus, and loved him, and called and equipped him to be a disciple ... and that is what matters! He shared in the work with Peter, and Andrew, and James, and John ... He lived for Christ and he died for Christ for church history records how he was sent after Pentecost to Persia (modern Iran) where he was eventually crucified for preaching the Gospel.

You might sometimes think you are not making any great impact for the Lord ... but you *are* by simply being *you* in His service. God has called *you*, - someone as individual and unique as *you*, - for a particular purpose He has for you to fulfil in His work. There are certain aspects that are perhaps given to you, and not to anyone else. He has called *you* from where you were to serve Him in those circumstances into which He has placed you ... among your family, your friends, and all those who know you. Like me, you will most probably never be known for doing anything particularly spectacular, but you are precious to the Lord for what He has called you to do for Him ...

There’s a work for Jesus, ready at your hand,
 ’Tis a task the Master just for you has planned.
 Haste to do His bidding, yield Him service true;
 There’s a work for Jesus none but you can do.

And then, when you complete your work on earth He will take you up into Glory, and you will hear Him say, **Mt. 25:21** **Well done, thou good and faithful servant.** ... And those will be the most wonderful words you will hear because they will be spoken by your Heavenly Father.

And that is how **James the son of Alphaeus** teaches us ... in the background ... to keep on following, to keep on serving, to keep on trusting ... even though we never make a name for ourselves in this world ... just as long as we simply and earnestly answer the obligation of our Heavenly calling, to present the lovely Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.