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## THE TWO WAYS OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

### CHAPTER 6

## ENTER JAMES, THE BROTHER OF JESUS

*"But he (Peter), beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. And he said, 'go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren.' And he departed, and went unto another place."*

Acts 12:17

**T**ime is a relative term. To a child who is eight years old, four years is an almost incomprehensible amount of time. It is half of his entire life. To a person twenty years old, it is still a long period of time and making a four year commitment to the military or to college is a very major decision.

A person eighty years old has an entirely different perspective on time. Four years seems to be an almost insignificant amount of time to someone who is eighty. So it is with many when trying to study history and trying to perceive the significance of four years. The past four years are not difficult at all. They are fresh in our minds. But a four year period that takes place two thousand years ago is much more difficult to bring into focus. To many of us, the year before our birth is ancient history. Twenty years before our birth is very ancient history. Two hundred years before our birth is only myth and legend and may not have happened at all.

It helps if we can project ourselves into the time we are considering and look at it through the eyes of a child. If we do so, everything appears bright and new. Our eyes are not clouded with age but bright and active like those of a child who has not yet learned how to talk. He sees everything. And everything is of the utmost urgency and interest. If we only knew what the child was thinking, we might be surprised at the wisdom in the little child's head.

### A Brief Review of the First Fifteen Years of the Church Age

So far, we have covered a period of about fifteen years in this study of the first century church. The first three years were alive with miracles, deliverance and unprecedented events in the history of the world. It was a time of "pouring out" of holy spirit from a vast supply. The "water of life" was received with great joy and caused wonderful growth and development in Jerusalem. The believers had favor with all the people of the city.

The next two years were much the same as the first three years. All the sick were healed, multitudes upon multitudes believed in Jesus Christ and a great company of the priests believed. But, signs of conflict begin to appear. Ananias and Sapphira are tragedies. The Apostles are arrested and commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus Christ. They cannot obey both God and the Sanhedrin and must choose who they will obey. Murmurings appear and after five years of the church age have gone by, the greatest tragedy of all occurs. Stephen is stoned.

The next three years begin with believers being driven out of Jerusalem. Glorious deliverance continues in spite of that city's resistance. The people of Samaria are blessed with signs and wonders and receive holy

spirit. Paul is introduced to Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. He goes to Arabia and then returns to Damascus. Jesus Christ continues to "pour out" God's blessings and deliverance. But conflict continues to appear. Simon tries to buy power from Peter in Samaria. The disciples are afraid of Paul when he returns to Jerusalem. The Grecians try to kill him. He has to leave town.

The final period, of about seven years, begins around the time that Paul leaves Israel and goes to Tarsus. Peter leaves Jerusalem and travels throughout the land, healing the sick and even raising the dead. Again we see great and wonderful deliverance. All the people in Lydda and Saron turn to the Lord. In Joppa, many believed in the Lord. In Caesarea, Cornelius, his family and his friends, believe and speak in tongues. Peter is amazed that the Gentiles had received the same gift as the Jews. But, when Peter returns to Jerusalem, he finds resistance and issues of law confronting him. At the same time, a great number of people believe in Antioch, Barnabus goes to Tarsus and brings back Paul to Antioch, and they both teach many people there in the following year. But, famine comes to the land of Israel.

### **Jerusalem at the Time James, the Apostle, was Killed**

Fifteen years had gone by since the age of grace had begun, and Acts 12 begins to show just how the church had changed in Jerusalem. Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, had the apostle James killed. And, because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he took Peter also. What a change from the accounts earlier in Acts where the Sanhedrin would not dare to kill the apostles because they feared the people! Perhaps nine years or so had gone by since the events of Acts 5, and now Herod saw that it PLEASED the people when he had James the apostle killed. What an incredible change!

Where were the multitudes of believers in Jerusalem? How had they changed? Granted, some of them were dispersed upon the death of Stephen. But still, if Christianity was as widespread in Jerusalem as the first six chapters of Acts indicate, all of Jerusalem should have remembered the miracles of Jesus Christ and the miracles of the apostles as well. Many had undoubtedly witnessed miracles in their own lives. The world had never seen miracles on such a scale since the dawn of time. And, of all the cities in the world, none could compare to Jerusalem in the number and quality of its devout citizens. The scripture was studied and discussed each day to an extent unparalleled in the rest of the world. It was the major activity of the city. Certainly the dramatic events of the first fifteen years of the church age were all thoroughly discussed and examined in the light of the prophecies of the Old Testament. However, by the time of Acts 12, it pleased the people to see an apostle killed. How could anything be more sad!

It is overwhelming to consider. An apostle, who was chosen by Jesus Christ, and who was taught by Jesus Christ, was killed and the people were pleased. How could they be pleased? All of Jerusalem should have been mourning its loss. Instead, they were pleased! Their attitude is reminiscent of the time when Moses led the Children of Israel out of Egypt. In spite of the miracles and deliverance the people saw, they still wanted to go back to Egypt! They even made a golden calf to worship. What "Golden Calves" were they building when James, the Apostle, was killed? Jerusalem was not some pagan town filled with statues to "unknown" gods. It was supposed to be the city that Abraham looked for, whose builder and maker was God. Its inhabitants were not people unconcerned with the things of God. What lies and distortions had been fed to the people to get them to the point of thinking it was the godly thing to do to kill one of the Apostles? How could the people think they were so right when they were, in fact, dead wrong?

The point being made is that, even fifteen years after the start of the church age, Jerusalem was still the most "godly" city in the world. It was the "best" city that the world had to offer. In fact, in all its long history, Jerusalem stands out as a contrast to all the other cities of the world. It has never had one single product for which it was famous. It was not on a major trade route. It was not at the mouth of a major river. Commerce was not the reason for Jerusalem's existence. Its industry was "godliness". And, its citizens were undoubtedly as "zealous for the law" at the time of the Apostle James' death as they were at any other time in their history. Fifteen years or so after the start of the age of grace, the Sanhedrin was finally able to effect the killing of an apostle, a desire they had hoped for since they "took council to slay them" (Acts 5:33) ten years prior.

Notice that Acts 12:1 says that Herod stretched forth his hands to vex "certain of the church." This was

not a general persecution of the church, it was selective. The term "certain of the church" is very revealing since it implies that Herod knew who was popular and who was unpopular in the church. If the church in Jerusalem was insignificant in size and impact, it is hard to imagine that Herod would have bothered to persecute "certain of the church". His doing so indicates that the church in Jerusalem was now a sizable and politically viable entity. The previous discussion regarding the size of the early church tends to confirm this conclusion. Similarly, had not Nero seen a significant Christian community in Rome in 64 A.D., he would not have tried to blame the fire on them.

Consideration of Herod's actions also reveals that there were at least two factions in the church, one faction popular and the other faction unpopular. Whether these factions developed around the "Hebrews" and "Grecians" or "Pharasees" and "non-Pharasees" or some other division, is not clear. However, we are led to the conclusion that it must have been the "trouble makers" within the church that Herod attacked.

The first one killed was the apostle James. Why? What did he do or say that caused the population to be pleased when Herod had him killed? Also, why was Herod's next move to take Peter? Why was he selected? Why would Peter's death please the Jews? Was Herod's intention to kill all twelve of the Apostles? It is critical to note that Herod was not persecuting the entire church. He was only doing that which was popular within the population of Jerusalem. He vexed "certain of the church."

### **Further Considerations**

To approach the subject from a different point of view, consider the relief sent in chapter eleven. It was sent to the brethren which dwelt in Judea (Acts 11:29). Presumably this includes the brethren in Jerusalem. It must have been massive relief when one considers the number of disciples in Antioch and that every man, according to his ability, determined to send relief. Notice also that Barnabas and Saul delivered the money to the "elders" in Jerusalem (Acts 12:25). This is the first time we encounter elders in the church.

It is unlikely that these "elders" were the six picked with Stephen because Stephen was killed. The other six were fulfilling the same task as Stephen and they would have been the most likely candidates for "leaving town" upon the persecution of Acts 8:1. We have already shown that Philip went to Caesarea and lived there later (Acts 21:8). Presumably, the other five left Jerusalem as well. In any event, there are elders in the church in Jerusalem by the time Barnabas and Saul delivered the relief money.

How had the church in Jerusalem changed? Why did not Paul and Barnabas deliver the relief money to the Apostles? Apparently they were all still in Jerusalem since Acts 9:28 tells us that Paul was "with them (the apostles) coming in and going out at Jerusalem" perhaps seven years earlier. How could the people in Jerusalem be pleased when an Apostle was killed? And, after James, the Apostle, was killed, it pleased the people when Peter was imprisoned! What had happened to the people in Jerusalem?

We will see in the discussion of Acts 21, that there were still a multitude of "believers" in Jerusalem almost thirty years after the start of the church age. But, they certainly were not "believers" as defined by Paul's epistles. There is ample evidence that they knew and understood the righteousness that could only be appropriated by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord. There is also evidence that the belief of earned righteousness or righteousness by the law contended with the righteousness of Christ for supremacy in Jerusalem.

Life in Jerusalem was not a matter of knowing the one form of righteousness and walking by it or knowing the other form of righteousness and walking by it. It seems evident that both doctrines were common knowledge and the people living there had to choose which they would live by. The rulers of the city were undoubtedly "self-righteous, vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds" as Paul would later write about deceivers in general in Col. 2:18.

The choice of "Christ righteousness" or "law righteousness" was not an easy one for the people to make. It seems clear that a price had to be paid in order to stay in Jerusalem after Stephen's death. And, it seems clear that the price paid was compromise. The believers who stayed must have had a constant struggle

with the carnal powers in a vain effort to keep the debilitating precepts of the law and yet try to satisfy their own minds that they were living as Christ wanted them to live. As one author pointed out, "Carnal men fuss about the 'weak and beggarly' forms of the law, spiritual men fulfill its spirit while disregarding its form". Those who saw danger in compromise left town. Those who compromised stayed.

### **The Imprisonment of Peter**

After the murder of the Apostle James, the brother of John, Herod proceeded to go after Peter. We know that his motivation was to please the people and rulers of Jerusalem, and the question to ask is, "what about Peter made Herod think it would please the Jews if he was "vexed"? Was it the fact that he had eaten with the Gentiles when he went to the house of Cornelius? Was it his proclamation that the Gentiles had received the same gift as the Jews? It must have been something that differed from the "norm" since Herod vexed only certain of the church.

It is apparent that Herod planned to kill Peter, as evidenced by the fact that the keepers of the prison were put to death when it was discovered that Peter had escaped. The Roman practice was evidently to inflict the prisoner's intended sentence on the guards if the prisoner escaped. When Peter is delivered from the prison, he goes to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. John Mark comes up later and, therefore, it is appropriate to stop and ask why Peter went to this house and not some other, or why he didn't leave town immediately.

The house of Mary was evidently a "recognized place of fellowship". A central fact to consider in this account is that the people there did not believe that God had delivered Peter. Where was their expectation of God's deliverance? After all, this was not some social party that Peter had broken into. They were assembled and were praying. This was a meeting of the church in Jerusalem and yet, when Peter came to them, they did not believe it was possible for him to be there. They thought he was a "spirit".

What kind of prayer were they praying? Acts 12:11 sets the "mood" of Jerusalem at the time. Peter's declaration after he realizes he has been delivered from prison is, "...The Lord... hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod and FROM ALL THE EXPECTATION OF THE PEOPLE OF THE JEWS." What were the people expecting that were praying in Mary's home? Did the people praying feel that if enough people prayed the volume of prayer would help? Did God ever need a multitude of people to deliver a request to Him? Was it not always that one believed and his prayer was answered?

At the risk of sounding arrogant, some idea of the prayer they were likely to be praying needs to be given. The prayers could not have been like Stephen's when he was being stoned and saw Jesus standing on the right hand of the Father. Perhaps they went something like, "Oh God, please save Peter's soul from hell when Herod kills him", or "Lord, forgive him for his sin in eating with Cornelius and help Herod to forgive him also". Some will say that it is unfair to speculate so. Perhaps it is, but I know of no other way to paint a picture of the state of affairs in Jerusalem at this time. Something is dramatically wrong, and to assume that everyone in the church was "a nice guy" ignores the problem rather than addressing it. The expectation of the people was that Peter would be killed. And, Acts 12:16 reports that when the people did see Peter, "they were astonished!" That is an indication of unbelief!

Verse seventeen also indicates unbelief. If the people were awed by God's power, would Peter have had to quiet them down? Would they not have been quiet in the first place? Is it not true that when God's power is made manifest that godly people stand in awe while the unbelieving raise a storm of protest, questions and "their two cents worth"?

There is a difference between a spontaneous burst of joy and a corresponding burst of contention. Somehow, it seems much more likely that objections were being raised to Peter having escaped from jail than that the people were thrilling in God's miraculous deliverance. The reasons for thinking this center on Peter's instruction after he explains how God delivered him. He says, "Go show these things unto James and to the brethren." Moffatt renders this, "report this to James and to the brothers." We are also told that Peter did not stay at Mary's house but went to another place. It evidently was not safe for him to stay at Mary's house. Notice that neither James, nor the brothers, were at the "prayer meeting". The obvious

unanswered question is "Why not?"

### **The Three Imprisonments of Peter**

Before proceeding further, consider for a moment the three imprisonments of Peter. The first imprisonment recorded in Acts 4, is a result of Peter healing the man lame from his birth. The Sanhedrin would have loved to punish him but could not do so because "all men glorified God for that which was done" (Acts 4:21).

The second imprisonment, in Acts 5, was caused by the overwhelming popularity of the Apostles as a result of the many signs and wonders they did. The high priest and his people were "filled with indignation" (Acts 5:17). In that second imprisonment, the angel of the Lord opened the prison and told Peter, and the other eleven, to go back to the Temple and teach the people (Acts 5:19-20).

The third imprisonment, in Acts 12, is not caused by great healing, signs and wonders in Jerusalem. It is not caused by indignation on the part of the High Priest. It is caused by Herod concluding that it would be a popular thing to do since it pleased the Jews when he killed the Apostle James (Acts 12:3). When Peter finally realizes that he had been delivered, he says to himself, "Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews" (Acts 12:11).

And, this time, Peter does not go back to the Temple when the angel of the Lord delivers him. He goes to a private home and is met with unbelief. When Rhoda heard his voice through the door, she was so thrilled that she ran back into the meeting to tell everybody and they said she was crazy! Even after she insisted, they said that it must be his angel (Acts 12:13-15).

With all these differences in mind it seems clear that the Jerusalem church by this time was a weak church, an unbelieving church, a worldly church that had been conformed to the political authority and absorbed into Judaism in general. The church in Jerusalem was certainly weakened by the "scattering" of the church in Acts 8:1, ten years earlier. It was weakened further by the Circumcision Party questioning Peter over the conversion of the household of Cornelius. It was weakened as well by the Grecians trying to kill Paul. Peter tells the people at Mary's house to go tell James and his brothers that he had escaped and then he leaves them. He had been "delivered FROM all the expectation of the people of the Jews" rather than being an example of God's deliverance TO all the people as he had been previously. His deliverance is not an occasion for great revival in Jerusalem. He does not have the opportunity to even save his jailers from death. There is no evidence that Peter had changed in any way. There is no reason to believe that he was any less powerful or any less dedicated than he had ever been. It seems clear that the people of Jerusalem changed. They had hardened their hearts to God's deliverance and were clinging tenaciously to their laws and customs in the face of God's deliverance.

It is true that Herod "dries up from the roots" in the following verses, but, "the expectation of the people of the Jews" did not "dry up from the roots". The resistance to God and His deliverance only increases as the rest of Acts unfolds. James, the brother of Jesus, appears on the scene for the first time since the outpouring of holy spirit and he appears at a time when Peter is being delivered from "all the expectation of the people of the Jews". The time is clearly marked by the death of King Herod Agrippa, 45 A.D..

### **James, the Brother of Jesus, Enters the Picture**

Who is this James and who are the brothers? James, the apostle, was just killed and it is well accepted that James, referred to in Acts 12:17, is the same James found in Acts 1:14. The brothers therefore would also be the brothers of Acts 1:14. The James referred to by Peter was the brother of Jesus Christ and the brothers were the other brothers of Jesus Christ-Joses, Jude, and Simon (Mk. 6:3).

Why did Peter instruct the people in John Mark's mother's house to go tell Jesus Christ's brothers how he had been delivered from Prison? It would seem more likely for Peter to have a report sent to the Apostle John or the other Apostles. Why was James, along with his brothers, singled out instead? What position

did they have in the church that Peter should report to them? Were they his "superiors" by this time? James, the brother of Jesus, is clearly the head of the Jerusalem church by the time of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. That event occurs about 49 A.D., only four years or so after Peter's last imprisonment. Peter's instruction to the people at Mary's house is the first mention of James in Acts since the day of Pentecost. He was certainly among the people in Jerusalem for the preceding fifteen years and yet he is not mentioned until Acts 12:17, and then, only in a nebulous sort of way.

Some will say that it is dangerous to speculate on Peter's motives, or to consider any other than highly spiritual, good will motives. For now, I will only point out that the church in Jerusalem was a sick church, a worldly church, a church that lacked power and a church that didn't expect deliverance. If nothing else, the record of Peter instructing those at Mary's house to go tell James and the brothers indicates that they were in some kind of position of authority in the Jerusalem church.

Remember, Herod saw that it pleased the people when he killed the apostle James. So, he proceeded to take Peter also. He did not imprison James, the brother of Jesus. In itself, the observation does not mean much. But when the words "certain of the church" are used in Acts 12:1 to describe who was being "vexed", it is natural to assume that some in the church were not being "vexed" and to ask if James, the brother of Jesus, was among the "vexed" group or the "unvexed" group.

How does one get to possible motives when the motive is not clearly stated? Some say that you don't. But, trial lawyers are trained in methods to uncover motive because it is so important. It is of the utmost importance to uncover even a hint of motive if the stakes are high enough. Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It will reveal motive. The more we search, the more it reveals. Jesus said, "seek and ye shall find." And so, we formulate a legitimate question and see if God's Word will answer it.

What was Peter's motive in reporting to James and his brothers? The account does not say, "Now this is Peter's motive." But, it does give Peter's instructions. Surely the whole city would know by the next morning that Peter had escaped. Why are we told that Peter wanted James informed of his escape in the middle of the night? The rest of Acts shows no action taken as a result of James being informed. All we can see on the surface is that James is mentioned for the first time, about fifteen years after the start of the church age. The motive is not clear, but there is considerable circumstantial evidence we can gather. And, circumstantial evidence is important- especially if all of it points in one direction, without any evidence pointing in the opposite direction.

### **The Evidence Regarding James**

What does the scripture tell us about James and his brothers? In Mark 6:1-6, we read of Jesus ministering in his home town of Nazareth. The people questioned both his ability and his authority by stating that he was a mere carpenter or workman- a term used of Jesus only by those who rejected him.

The account mentions his brothers, James, Joses, Juda and Simon, along with his sisters. We are told that the people were offended by him. They state, regarding Jesus' brothers and sisters, "are they not all here WITH US?" (The greek word for "with" is pros). Does this indicate that James and his brothers and sisters were on the side of those who were offended by Jesus? Jesus' response adds clarity. He says, "A prophet is not without honor but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." Matthew 13:54-58 has a similar account.

Jesus own statement about his family was that they gave him no honor. We can find no higher authority than Jesus Christ's own statements on which to rely in finding out about James and his brothers. If there were other places in the Scriptures that contained statements of Jesus saying that His brothers or sisters DID honor him, then the two accounts above would have to be qualified. However, there are none. Therefore, we must conclude that Jesus made the statement because He wanted it known that his family did not honor him- He was without honor in His own home!

In Luke 2:42-52 is an account of Jesus in Jerusalem at the age of twelve. Notice that when His parents

came back to Jerusalem to look for Jesus- after having started on their way home- they found him in the Temple. They had spent three days looking for him and finally decided to look in the Temple. Why did they not look there first? In verse forty nine Jesus asks them, "Did you not know that I must be about my father's business?"

These are the first recorded words that Jesus spoke. We must therefore ask, "Should Jesus' parents have known that Jesus had to be about His Father's business?" They surely should have. The visit by angels to both Mary and Joseph are only two of the reasons they should have known. It is interesting that verse forty three says, "and Joseph and his mother knew not of it". It doesn't say that his father and mother knew not of it. And, when Mary says in verse forty eight, "thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing", Jesus replies, "How is it that ye sought me? Knew ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" The following verse says that they did not understand what He was saying to them.

Who was Jesus Father anyway? Was it Joseph? Certainly Mary knew it was not Joseph. They had brought him up to Jerusalem when he was twelve years old and when Jesus asked them, "did you not know that I must be about my father's business", either they should have been well aware of where He was supposed to be, or else Jesus was being sarcastic with them.

Since from other scriptures we know that Jesus never sinned and was therefore the model son, we must conclude that He was honestly asking a question to which their proper answer should have been "yes". But, they didn't know what He was talking about.

I do not mean to suggest that Jesus' parents were wicked or ungodly. However, even though they had seen much evidence that this was an exceptional child- the virgin birth, the visit by angels, the deliverance from the hand of Herod, the prophesies of Simeon and Anna, and the experience of Elizabeth and Zacharias regarding John the Baptist- they did not keep His Messianic mission foremost in their minds. Otherwise, when they found Him absent on the way home, they would have immediately gone to the Temple where they could easily have concluded He would be.

The picture we have gathered so far shows that at least Jesus did not get full support from his family. But, to be indifferent about the Christ is one thing; to actively resist him is quite another. In Mark 3:14-19 is the record of Jesus ordaining the twelve apostles. Verse twenty one is the record of His families response upon hearing the news. The word "friends" in that verse should be translated "kinsfolk". Moffatt translates it "family". and the word clearly refers to His brothers and mother as mentioned again in verse thirty one.

What were Jesus' mother and brothers doing? They were attempting to lay hold on Jesus because they thought He was crazy! The reason they thought so is probably because Jesus had picked twelve disciples to whom He would later promise that they would rule over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). If that was the reason, their objections could have been either to the fact that he dared to choose such a group or because He chose the kind of men that he did- for the most part, mere fishermen.

Perhaps we should pause here before continuing, because it is certainly not easy to accept that Jesus' mother and brothers thought Jesus was crazy. But, if the entire section from Mark 3:21 to Mark 3:35 is examined as one story, in one context, then the evidence is conclusive that they were against Him. The words "beside himself" could be translated "out of his senses". Moffatt translates it "out of his mind".

The scribes said He was possessed of devils (verse 22). But, at least, they were not family. For Jesus to find that even his own family thought he was crazy must have been a very bitter pill to swallow. We have in this account a very serious cause for concern. If there were any Scriptures that could offset this action on the part of Jesus family, then we should dismiss it as an addition to the text or an interpreters erroneous rendering. But, we can find no offsetting record and must therefore conclude that the text is correct when it presents Jesus' family attempting to capture Jesus and put Him away because they thought He was crazy.

Perhaps the greatest indictment of the family comes from Jesus Himself when He is told that His family wants to see him. His response is to totally deny them by saying, "Whosoever shall do the will of God, the

same is my brother and my sister and mother." (Mark 3:33-35).

Luke 8:19-21 presents the same circumstance. Here, Jesus' mother and brothers stated that they desired to see Jesus. However, we've seen in Mark that they didn't just want to see him, they wanted to put him away because they thought He was crazy. When told of their presence, Jesus replies, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the Word of God and DO IT!"

What was Jesus saying? He was saying that his mother and brothers were not doing the will of God! Think for a moment about how Jesus must have felt. Here his family thought He was crazy and wanted to capture Him, lay hold on him, and put him away. It is one thing to have the scribes and religious leaders accuse him of being possessed. But, far more bitter than this, his own family thought that he was crazy!

There are records in the scripture that vindicate Mary and Joseph. Mary even encouraged Jesus to do his first miracle of turning water into wine. In fact, a case can be made that the only reason Jesus did that miracle is because his mother asked him to do it.

No such records exist to vindicate Jesus' brothers. Was Mary intimidated by Jesus' brothers into going with them when they tried to put him away? It seems likely. Whether Joseph refused to go or was dead by this time, is not known. It is evident that he was not party to the action because the scripture would certainly have mentioned him if he was.

### **Jesus' Brothers Taunt Jesus**

In John 7 is a record of Jesus confronting his brothers. In John 7:1 we read that Jesus stayed in Galilee because He knew that people in Judea sought to kill him. His brothers however, in verse three, advise him to go up to Judea. It seems clear that they also knew that people in Judea sought to kill Jesus and, therefore, the question must be raised as to their motive in giving Jesus such advice.

Remember, Jesus ministry lasted only three years (some people say one year because Jesus was the Passover lamb and the Passover lamb was to be one year old. However, Jesus would have been at least thirty one years old and to equate one year of age to one year of ministry is not sound reasoning. Also, three Passover feasts are listed in the Gospel of John (Jn. 2:13, 6:4, and 13:1), the first occurring after Jesus had spent considerable time in Galilee (Jn. 2:12), and the last occurring at the time of His crucifixion. It could be argued that Jesus ministry was less than three full years, but certainly not one year. And, if Jesus was born in the spring of the year, when shepherd's would have been in the fields "watching their flocks by night" during lambing season, most likely His ministry lasted three full years). Since only two years or so had passed since the brothers of Jesus had tried to "put Him away", there is no reason to assume that their attitude had changed from thinking Him crazy. Certainly, if there was such a change in attitude, there would be a record of the change in the scripture. There is no such record. Also, they were not among "the twelve" picked by Jesus nor were any of them considered to take Judas place in Acts 1.

The argument used by Jesus' brothers seems to be that the disciples in Judea had the right to see Jesus' works. The end of verse three could read, "in order that they also may be spectators of the works that thou doest." The word "see" in Jn. 7:3 is the greek word "theoreo", meaning "to view" or literally "place-see". "Theory" is a close english equivalent. The challenge of Jesus brothers to Jesus is that the people in Judea should have the opportunity to view Jesus works, be able to theorize on them, speculate on them, view them, consider them, behold them. The Amplified Bible translates John 7:3, "So His brothers said to Him, Leave here and go to Judea, so that Your disciples there may also see the works that you do. This is no place for you." They are clearly baiting Jesus or taunting Him. The four Gospels are clear that Jesus had already done many mighty works in Judea and so on the face of it, the accusation, or challenge, or argument, is the result of unbelief and not the sincere desire of supportive brothers.

In verse four, the brothers prod him further by accusing him of acting in secret rather than openly. Knoch translates verse four, "For no one is doing anything in hiding when he is seeking publicity." Moffatt says, "For nobody who aims at public recognition ever keeps his actions secret." Verse five says, "For neither did His brethren believe in Him." The verse clearly states their motive- THEY DID NOT BELIEVE IN



HIM! There is no question at all about their motive. The scripture could not be any clearer. But, just to make sure that there could be no doubt whatsoever regarding their motive, Jesus says, "THE WORLD CANNOT HATE YOU, BUT ME IT HATETH BECAUSE I TESTIFY OF IT THAT THE WORKS THEREOF ARE EVIL!"

Note the amazing contrast that Jesus makes between himself and his brothers. He says that it is impossible for the world to hate James, Jude, Joses and Simon. On the other hand, the world did hate Jesus. The contrast between Jesus and His brothers is absolute.

I think sometimes we don't appreciate just how hated Jesus was. We remember that He was crucified, but that was only one event. There are many others throughout His ministry. It is one thing to be hated when there is cause. But, Jesus Christ did no wrong and yet He was HATED! In the gospel of John alone, there are at least twenty instances of people trying to harm or kill Him. (See John 4:29; 5:18,19,20; 7:1,25,30,44; 8:6,20,37,48,59; 9:20; 10:31,39; 11:8,47,53; 12:10,33; 15:25). Surely He was hated among a broad spectrum of people. He was also loved by many. In fact, it is doubtful if there were any in Israel during His life that had a "take him or leave him attitude". If there were, it is hard to imagine. He didn't leave much room for the "take it or leave it" folks.

But, Jesus' own brothers were against Him. What brothers Jesus had! They were held in favor by the forces of the world and yet, perhaps fifteen to twenty years later, Peter is sending a report of his escape from prison to these same brothers. In John 7:8, Jesus tells his brothers that He is not going with them to the feast in Jerusalem. However, in verse ten, after they leave, He goes up secretly. Why did Jesus not go to the feast with his brothers? The answer seems clear. They did not believe in Him! In all probability, they would have turned him in to the people who sought him out so that they could kill him. At least, Jesus did not trust them. What a picture of the brothers of Jesus!

### **James, the Brother of Jesus, Vilified**

The evidence is overwhelming regarding Jesus' brothers. We would not belabor the point except that James, the brother of Jesus, grows in prominence in the Jerusalem church as the book of Acts unfolds. His position in the church grows as the Jerusalem church forsakes God's deliverance and blessing and reverts to what Paul later refers to as a form of godliness that denies the power of God. This is a shocking realization and one that is not easy to digest. But the further one investigates into the matter in the Word of God, the clearer it becomes that only one conclusion can honestly be drawn. James never was, and does not become, a "good guy". The conclusion is troubling. It is so unpleasant that you may want to turn your back or cover your eyes. I felt the same way at times over the past ten years. And yet, it seems unavoidable that we must understand this situation if we do not wish to doom ourselves to repeating it. Think about it. Look around. The results of not understanding have been, and continue down to this moment to be, costly to the body of Christ.

It is tempting to say that the only fight of the first century church was a fight between those without and those within. Certainly there was a fight. However, the more the book of Acts is studied, the clearer it becomes that the primary fight was within the Christian church over how the Christian should live, by law or by grace. James was within the Jerusalem church and became the leader of that church. And, Jesus said that the world could not hate him!

Josephus, a priest who lived in or around Jerusalem from his birth in 37 A.D. until the destruction of the city in 70 A.D., tells us that James, the brother of Jesus, was stoned to death after the death in office of the Roman Governor Festus in 62 A.D. and before Albinus arrived to take his place (Antiquities XX.9,1). On the surface one would think that the world did hate James. However, Josephus goes on to say, "those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were uneasy at the breach of laws, they disliked what was done." If we consider the fact that Josephus was certainly not a Christian, that he speaks highly of James, that James was killed during a "power vacuum" in Israel, and that the "most equitable of the citizens" objected to the stoning of James, it seems clear that James was held in respect by the "worldly powers".

It should also be pointed out that Paul was imprisoned for two years in Caesarea under Antonius Felix, until Felix was removed from office in 59 A.D. because he was accused by the Jews, before Nero, of bad administration. Porcius Festus then became Governor and tried to move Paul's trial back to Jerusalem to appease the Jews. Paul insisted on his right of appeal to Caesar as a Roman citizen, presumably to avoid certain death in Jerusalem. It is reasonable to assume that the removal of Felix had at least something to do with his protection of Paul in Caesarea because of the immediate attempt to get Festus to move the trial back to Jerusalem upon his arrival to take over as governor or procurator. This was no small issue in Israel. And, if Josephus' portrayal of James is considered, the failure of the effort to kill Paul could have been laid at James' feet by the more radical element in Jerusalem although the "most equitable of the citizens" objected to James being killed (two years after Paul was taken to Rome and about the time of Paul's trial before Nero). It seems clear, even from Josephus account, that the "world" did not hate James.

James is a man who thought his brother was crazy, he is a man that did not believe in Jesus. And, he is a man that Jesus says very clearly the world cannot hate. If there were no other evidence against James, this only would suffice to indict him- Jesus said, "The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil."

From Jesus statement on, there is no evidence of a change of heart on the part of James recorded for us in the scripture. James does call himself "a servant of Jesus Christ" (James 1:1) but never mentions the resurrection of Jesus Christ in his epistle. He writes to the twelve tribes of the dispersion and not to "Christians", or "believers", or "saints" among these twelve tribes. We must conclude that James was of the world and not of God! There is no record that he was converted, no record of any miracle that he performed, no record that he spoke in tongues. In short, nothing to suggest that he repented or changed in any way other than to gain the ascendancy in the Jerusalem church. And, by the middle of Acts, Peter is afraid of him! (Gal.2:12). Peter, a man not afraid to step out of a boat and walk on water, a man not afraid to cut off the ear of one of the soldiers who came to arrest Jesus, a man not afraid to break the Jewish laws and eat with Cornelius, becomes a man afraid of James. This is an awesome thing to consider.

Many have concluded that James must have been born again because he was the head of the Jerusalem church. It is a circular argument and goes nowhere. Position certainly does not guarantee godliness. In fact, if I were satan, I would try my hardest to put my men behind every pulpit in the world, at the head of every denomination in the world and at the head of every board of deacons in the world. Hopefully, he hasn't succeeded, but, you can bet that he never gives up in his effort, and you can bet that he has not been a total failure. I will concede that James may have been "saved", but there is no indication in the scripture that he was other than his own declaration in James 1:1.

If we examine Acts and the rise of James in the light of what is recorded in scripture about him, we will have a whole different picture develop than is commonly imagined. Instead of trying to harmonize what Paul says with what James says, and harmonize what Paul does with what James does, we should realize that the two are absolute contrasts. In Paul we have the walk by the spirit. In James we have the walk by the flesh.

You may ask, "how could all the believers in Jerusalem be fooled by James?" The answer is simple. They weren't fooled! They chose to walk by the flesh instead of by the spirit. And, who more eminent to lead them by the flesh than Jesus' fleshly brother? In fact, the name, James, is close to the old testament name, Jacob, or "supplanter".

James is the first obvious case of nepotism in the Christian church. And, just the fact that Judiasm had a sect called "The Sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5) implies that the Jews lumped Jesus and his brothers into one movement and called the movement the Sect of the Nazarenes. If the movement was recognized as being led by Jesus Christ alone, it seems that they would have called it the sect of the Nazarene. Remember also that many believers were forced out of Jerusalem upon the death of Stephen. James' rise in the Jerusalem church happens after these people leave. He evidently did not leave. Could it be that Ananias and Sapphira were trying to impress James by lying about their offering? Could James have been the head of the "Hebrew" faction in Acts 6:1? I do not know the answer to these questions. But, since

starting ten years ago to investigate James, much has come to light that I never saw at all in the scripture prior to that time. Perhaps even these questions are answered in the scripture. We miss so much truth because we do not expect to find it. As our expectation to find truth increases, so also will our satisfaction increase when we discover that God has answered our questions long ago and the answers await our discovery.

One other piece of evidence should be presented regarding the brothers of Jesus before we return to Acts 12. John 19 contains the record of the crucifixion of Jesus. Verse twenty six and twenty seven show Jesus giving custody of his mother to "the disciple whom Jesus loved." In Jewish law, it was the responsibility of the eldest son to provide for the welfare of his mother in the event that the father was dead or gone- which Joseph must have been. In this account, Jesus fulfills his duty and the obvious question is, "Why didn't Jesus intrust the care of his mother to James or his other brothers?" They were certainly there, and James was the head of the Jerusalem church fifteen years later.

The fact of the matter seems obvious. Jesus would not trust his brothers with the custody of his mother. Also, it should be noted that although James was with the "about one hundred twenty" in the ten days between the ascension and the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14), he was not picked to replace Judas as an apostle, nor was he considered. This fact is certainly significant in light of the fact that he later becomes head of the Jerusalem church.

As we continue in Acts, we will see that James rises to the position of controlling the entire church in Jerusalem. A man who thought Jesus was crazy, a man who Jesus did not pick to be an apostle, a man that Jesus said the world could not hate, a man who apparently wanted Jesus captured by those who sought to kill him, a man that Jesus would not even entrust the care of his mother to, a man who was not even considered to take Judas' place, let alone being selected, finally becomes the head leader of the church in Jerusalem.

And so, in Acts 12 we find that the church, for the most part, is an unbelieving church; political expedience replaces godliness, and Peter is seen sending a report to James and his brothers and then leaving town. We find the people in Israel worshiping Herod, the angel of the Lord smiting Herod, and Barnabas and Saul leaving town after having delivered the relief to the famine stricken area. The time, about 45 A.D., fifteen years after the start of the church age.



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