



# James, the Son of Zebedee

Transformed People: The Twelve Apostles

*(B.L. Newberry, Spring 2020)*

# James within the Twelve (1 of 2)



Luke 6:14-16

Peter  
Andrew  
**James**  
John

Philip  
Bartholomew  
Matthew  
Thomas

James (the less)  
Simon  
Thaddeus  
Judas Iscariot

- James is a common name and multiple individuals with the name appear in the New Testament.
  - James, the Son of Zebedee
  - James, the Son of Alphaeus
  - James, the Lord's half brother
- James is the brother of John (sons of Zebedee)
  - They were likely wealthy fishermen [**Mark 1:19-20**]
  - It is likely the family was well known [**John 18:15-16**]
  - Most modern scholars believe Salome was the mother of James and John, but it is not 100% clear [**John 19:25**]. It is possible she was Mary's sister [**Matt. 27:56**].
  - Likely the eldest brother (typically named first)

# James within the Twelve (2 of 2)



Luke 6:14-16

Peter  
Andrew  
**James**  
John

Philip  
Bartholomew  
Matthew  
Thomas

James (the less)  
Simon  
Thaddeus  
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- James is a part of the inner circle (Peter, James, and John)
  - Jesus raising Jairus' daughter [**Mark 5:37**]
  - Mount of Transfiguration [**Matt. 17:1-8**]
  - Garden of Gethsemane [**Matt. 26:36-46**]
- James is passionate, ambitious, and outspoken
  - What little we know of him tends to be extremely bold
  - He is not, however, discussed individually in scripture except at his death

# James - Martyred Apostle



- The bold and passionate spirit of James generated attention and enemies.

It was about this time that King Herod (Agrippa I, not Antipas) arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. **[Acts 12:1-4]**

- James is the first apostle to die for the mission.



**The Martyrdom of St James**  
Artist: Francisco de Zurbarán (1598 - 1664)

# James' Character

## *Calling Fire from Heaven (1 of 2)*



- Mark 3:17 records James and John were nicknamed ***Boanerges*** (sons of Thunder). This is an apt description of James (and his brother).
- **Luke 9:51-56**  
**As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village.**
- To understand this story fully, we need to examine 2 Kings 1.

# 2 Kings 1



## Vs. 1-4

After Ahab's death, Moab rebelled against Israel. 2 Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself. So he sent messengers, saying to them, "Go and consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury." 3 But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Go up and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?'" 4 Therefore this is what the Lord says: 'You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!'"

*Ahaziah sent his men to get Elijah ...*

## Vs. 9-10

Then he sent to Elijah a captain with his company of fifty men. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, "Man of God, the king says, 'Come down!'" 10 Elijah answered the captain, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!" Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.

# James' Character

## *Calling Fire from Heaven (2 of 2)*



- The Samaritans didn't like the Jews any more than most Jews liked them. Jesus often associated with Samaritans, but this was very uncommon for Jews. In this case, the Samaritans have decided to make things hard for Jesus and his followers.
- The physical area in which this is happening is the same as the story in 2 Kings 1.
- James and John seem to think an Elijah-like reaction is called for in this case. Jesus does not.
  - Elijah was an instrument of God's judgement. Elijah was acting on God's behalf.
  - Jesus' mission was rather different; salvation, not destruction. [[Luke 19:10](#)]

# James' Character

## *Desiring Thrones (1 of 2)*



- Remember that James is part of the inner circle of Jesus' apostles. It seems they wanted more, however.
- **Matt. 20:20-23**  
James, John, and their mother approach Jesus. She requests special positions for her sons in His kingdom. They are part of the request, however, answering that they are “able to drink the cup He will drink”.
- This is a bold statement to their personalities and the others didn't take it well [reference **Matt. 20:24ff**].
- **They were so close to Jesus, yet still full of themselves. Are we ever the same?**

# James' Character

## *Desiring Thrones (2 of 2)*



- MacArthur in “Twelve Ordinary Men” (p.91) has a magnificent statement about James that is valuable for us to consider:  
  
“James wanted a crown of glory; Jesus gave him a cup of suffering. He wanted power; Jesus gave him servanthood. He wanted a place of prominence; Jesus gave him a martyr’s grave. He wanted to rule; Jesus gave him a sword—not to wield but to be the instrument of his own execution. Fourteen years after this, James would become the first of the Twelve to be killed for his faith.”
- **How do we wrestle with the fact that for some believers, the act of following Christ will result in hardships, suffering, and even accelerated death?**

# Stories of James' Death

(Most of this is from historical, not Biblical sources)



- James' death is recorded in Acts 12:1ff. We can date this to AD 44.
- The word martyr comes from the Greek for “witness”.
- Eusebius, telling a story from Clement, records that at his death, James' witness was strong ... Clement writes “the one who led James to the judgment-seat, when he saw him bearing his testimony, was moved, and confessed that he was himself also a Christian. ... He begged James to forgive him. And James, after considering a little, said, ‘Peace be with thee,’ and kissed him. And thus they were both beheaded at the same time.”

# Closing Remarks



1. Though bold and often reckless, James was a passionate follower of Jesus that answered the call without hesitation [**Matt. 4:21-22**]. By worldly standards, he likely has several reasons to hesitate. Yet he did not!
2. James had to learn to control his zeal, however. The nickname “sons of Thunder” was not a positive, but rather a statement of a trait to be mastered. We too must learn to master our own ambitions and desires. “To live is Christ” [**Philippians 1:21**]
3. Greatness is found in serving and in sacrificing. James learned this truth well, ultimately demonstrated in his death. **Matt. 20:27** - “**and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave.**”