

James and Jude

The Bible tells us about two very special brothers named James and Jude. They each wrote a book of the New Testament. They were both respected leaders of the early Church. But what made these two brothers unique was that they were also the brothers of Jesus Christ!

In Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 we read that Jesus had four younger half-brothers. They were half-brothers because they were all the children of Mary, but Jesus did not have the human father (Joseph) that His younger brothers had. Two of these brothers were James and Jude.

These two brothers both grew up under the shadow of their oldest brother, Jesus. In oriental society the firstborn son is given a high position of respect and influence. Also, the Gospels suggest that Mary's husband Joseph had already probably died before Jesus became 30 years old and started His ministry. That would have left Jesus as the man of the house. Jesus would have been responsible to guide and provide for His widowed mother and His younger brothers and sisters. We can see that Jesus was still concerned with this responsibility while He was on the cross, when He asked the Apostle John to take care of His mother in John 19:26-27.

As they were growing up together, James and Jude did not know that their elder brother Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. While their mother knew this, the scripture says "*Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart,*" (Luke 2:19 & 51). Mary kept secret for many years the angelic visitations and prophecies given to her. We can read that even during the time of Jesus' public ministry "*His brothers did not believe in Him,*" (Jn. 7:3-5).

Yet can we underestimate what an impact it must have made in their lives, to have Jesus as their eldest brother? And after Mary became a widow, can we imagine what it must have been like to have Jesus as the man who ran the household? They saw the example of complete perfection leading the family! What a standard of righteousness must have been upheld in that house! Mary probably told her sons and daughters countless times, "Whatever He says to you, do it," as she said to the servants at the wedding at Cana in John 2:5. Is it any wonder that the message of righteousness thunders out of the epistles that James and Jude later wrote for the New Testament? For over twenty years these two brothers had grown up under the shadow of His perfect life, while the apostles only walked with Jesus for three and a half years.

First Corinthians 15:7 tells us that one of the personal resurrection appearances of Jesus was to his younger brother, James. Perhaps after Christ's crucifixion Mary also told her children the stories about the birth of Jesus. Yet James and Jude had both become believers before the day of Pentecost. Acts 1:14 tells us that the brothers of Jesus, along with their mother, Mary, were among the believers in the upper room who were praying and waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

James arose in the next ten years to become the leading elder of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17, 15:13-19, 21:18-26 and Gal. 2:9). These scriptures are not about the apostle James, who had been killed by King Herod in Acts 12:2. History records that James, the brother of Jesus, lived such a righteous life that he was honored by the early believers with the title "James the Just." History also records that he died as a faithful martyr in about 62 A.D. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, reported that the high priest, Ananias, had James stoned to death. Yet his godly life was so highly respected by even the non-Christian Jews that their protests caused Ananias to be removed from his office.

Jude may have become a traveling preacher and prophet, as suggested by First Corinthians 9:5 and Acts 15:22 & 32. We can see in his epistle that Jude certainly had clear prophetic discernment as well as a fiery prophetic determination to oppose sin. While early church history tells us nothing more about the end of his life, an account has been left us about two of his grandchildren. The early church historian Eusebius wrote that the Roman Emperor Diocletian had been suspicious that the Christians were rebelliously starting another kingdom. When the Emperor personally questioned Jude's grandchildren (as close descendants of Christ, the King) they testified of their faith before him. However, the Emperor released them as he saw that they were only simple farmers without political ambitions. Yet this account adds testimony to the lasting influence that Jude's godly life had not only on the early Church, but also on his descendants.

While James and Jude did not believe the preaching of Jesus during His public ministry, we can still see how the influence of Christ's life made a great impact upon their lives. This helped prepare them to become important leaders and writers in the early Church. Perhaps you are discouraged about relatives and other people who seem to only be ignoring what you preach or testify to them. Be patient, and live a godly life before them. The power of God shining out of a consecrated life can begin to convict and change others long before they will understand what you are preaching about. Like James, Jude, Saul of Tarsus, and countless others, the most difficult unbelievers that you know may be touched by your godly life, and may become the most fervent and faithful servants of Christ!