10-2018

A Biographical Study of James the Apostle

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James the Apostle

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

I. The ministry of James

A. His call

1. James’s first contact with Jesus (Matt. 4:21-22; Mark 1:19-20; Luke 5:10-11)—
   “And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of
   Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending
   their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their
   father, and followed him” (Matt. 4:21-22).

2. James’s formal call by Jesus (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:17; Luke 6:14)

B. His companions—James was especially close to his brother and to Simon Peter.
   These three alone:

   1. Saw the transfiguration of Christ (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28)
   2. Were present at the resurrection of Jairus’s daughter (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51)
   3. Were asked by Christ to watch and pray in Gethsemane (Mark 14:33)

C. His carnality—On at least three occasions, the fleshly nature of James was
   displayed.

   1. As seen by a sectarian event (Mark 9:38-41; Luke 9:49-50)—“And John
      answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we
      forbade him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid
      him not: for he that is not against us is for us” (Luke 9:49-50). Note: It is
      assumed John’s personal pronoun “we” as used here was a reference to his
      brother James.

   2. As seen by a selfish event (Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45)

      a. The request of the two—“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come
         unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us
         whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I
         should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one
         on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory” (Mark 10:35-
         37).

      b. The resentment of the ten—“And when the ten heard it, they began to be
         much displeased with James and John” (Mark 10:41).

      c. The response of the Lord

         (1) Toward the two—“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” (Matt. 20:23).

         (2) Toward the ten—“But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know
             that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they
             that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among
             you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;
             And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even
as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and
to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25-28).

3. As seen by a spiteful event
   a. The refusal demonstrated by the Samaritans—“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, And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and
      entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they
      did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to
   b. The retaliation demanded by the brothers—“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?” (Luke 9:54).
   c. The rebuke delivered by the Lord—“But he turned, and rebuked them, and
      said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not
      come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another

II. The martyrdom of James
   A. The monarch—“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to
      vex certain of the church” (Acts 12:1).
   B. The method—“And he killed James the brother of John with the sword” (Acts
      12:2).

STATISTICS
Father: Zebedee (Matt. 4:21)
Mother: Salome (Mark 15:40)
Brother: John (Matt. 4:21)
First mention: Matthew 4:21
Final mention: Acts 12:2
Meaning of his name: “Heel catcher, supplanter” (Note: both he and his brother John were
               nicknamed “Boanerges” by Christ, meaning “Sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17).
Frequency of his name: Referred to 19 times
Occupation: Fisherman before becoming one of Christ’s three key apostles
Place of birth: Probably Bethsaida in Galilee
Method of death: He was killed by the sword (Acts 12:2).
Important fact about his life: He was the first apostle to be martyred for Christ.