



Who Are The Apostles? Week #4: Introducing James, The Greater

Apostle:

- Those who had witnessed the resurrected Christ.
- Those who were commissioned by Him to spread the gospel into the world.
- Those who had the Holy Spirit work miraculous power through them.

Apostles, symbols of In Christian art, symbols assigned to each of the apostles:

- **Andrew:** X-shaped cross because was crucified on one;
- Bartholomew: knife because he was flayed alive with one;
- **James the Greater:** scallop shell, pilgrim staff, or a gourd bottle because he is the patron saint of pilgrims;
- James the Less: fuller’s pole because he was killed with one;
- **John:** cup with a winged serpent because he drank poison after making a sign of the cross;
- Judas Iscariot: bag because he kept money in it;
- Jude: club because he was martyred with it;
- Matthew: hatchet or halberd because he was killed with it;
- Matthias: battleaxe because he was beheaded with it;
- Paul: sword because he was beheaded with one;
- Peter: bunch of keys because Christ gave him the keys of the kingdom;
- Simon: a saw because he was sawn to death;
- Phillip: long staff surmounted with a cross because he suffered death by being suspended by the neck from a pillar;
- Thomas: lance with which he was pierced through at Mylapore, India.¹

Andrew bar-Jonas

Peter (Simon bar-Jonas)

James bar-Zebedee
 (“James the Greater”)

John bar-Zebedee (“the Beloved Disciple”)

Nathanael or **Bartholomew**

Philip

Thomas

Matthew or **Levi**

James bar-Alphaeus

Thaddaeus or **Lebbaeus** or

Judas bar-James (Jude)

Simon the Zealot

Judas Iscariot

The order of the list is significant. All the lists of the twelve break them into three groups of four (John does not list them, but tells of their calling in the same groupings). This is clearly consistent with their status within the group.

PATRONAGE:

- A patron was a person who, by their wealth and/or political power, was in a position to bestow favors, protection, and an umbrella of benevolence upon their clients.
- A client was one who received this benevolence and in return owed an obligation of service and loyalty to the patron.

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

Matthew 4:18-22

¹⁸ While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Mark 1:16-20

¹⁶ Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the

¹ Kurian, G. T. (2001). In *Nelson’s new Christian dictionary: the authoritative resource on the Christian world*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.



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nets. ²⁰ **And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.**

Luke 5:1-11

*5 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret,² and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.³ Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."⁵ And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."⁶ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.⁷ They **signaled to their partners in the other boat** to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."⁹ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken,¹⁰ **and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.** And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."¹¹ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.*

Why "James the Greater"?

- More than one James:
 - James, the Less(younger) - Son of Alphaeus, one of the 12 disciples. (Last Triad of Four)
 - Saint James – The Lord's brother. He was granted a special appearance of the Lord after the Resurrection. He was with St. Peter, a leader of the church at Jerusalem. He was put to death by the Sanhedrin in 62.
- Patronage system – First Triad of Four
- First Born (Birth Order)
- Older than John
- One of the "Sons of Thunder" ☺

Mark 3:16-19

¹⁶ He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸ Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

- Jesus gave Simon the name Peter to encouraged this 'rock like steadfastness' into his character and we see the name Peter all throughout N.T.
- Mark 3 is the only place we see Boanerges – WHY?
- Was this nickname a gentle chiding? An admonishment?
- Did James wrestle with a fiery, vehement disposition?
When the Samaritans were rude to Jesus, James and John asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" Jesus, of course, rebuked them

Luke 9:54

⁵¹ When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. ⁵³ But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (as Elijah did)



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⁵⁵ But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶ And they went on to another village.

(Some manuscripts add *And he said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of; ⁵⁶for the Son of Man came not to destroy people's lives but to save them"*)

- Wealthier/Prominent Family – More prestige in the community
Did James ever contend that this should allow him more leadership opportunities?
Being “a son of Zebedee” communicated their father was well known and well established.
They knew the high priest and family on a personal basis:

John 18:15-16

¹⁵ Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. **Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest,** ¹⁶ but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, **who was known to the high priest,** went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in.

Tribe of Levi? Known from Capernaum to Jerusalem to the High Priest’s household
Was this a reason why there appeared to be disputes about who was the greatest amongst them?

Mark 9:33-37 (Matthew 18:1-4; Luke 9:46-48) *Who Is the Greatest?*

³³ And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵ And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” ³⁶ And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

In **Mark 10:35–37** James and John ask Jesus if they can rule next to Him in His kingdom.

Luke 22:24-30 *Who Is the Greatest?*

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. ²⁵ And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. ²⁷ For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. ²⁸ “You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, ²⁹ and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, ³⁰ that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Matthew 23:11 – The greatest among you shall be your servant

- Patronage – Name Listing:

Mark 3:16–19

¹⁶ He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸ Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Acts 1:13 (in the NKJV)

¹³ And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James.

ESV ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James.



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Was he second in influence after Peter?

Top Triad – Circle of Three

- He raised Jairus's daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37). [Saw Jesus' power.]
- The Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1). [Saw Jesus' glory]
- James was among four disciples who questioned Jesus privately on the Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3). [Saw Jesus' sovereignty in how He answered them.]
- To pray with Him privately in Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). [Saw Jesus' agony.]

The Jerusalem (Apostolic) Council – Acts 15

- Headed by James the Great
- Met in Jerusalem
- Problem:
In the earliest days of the Christian church, the church was comprised predominately of Jews. Acts chapter 8 the gospel spread to the Samaritans (who were ethnically mixed Jews-Gentiles), and many Samaritans received Jesus Christ as Savior.
Acts chapter 10, the Apostle Peter was the first to take the gospel specifically to the Gentiles, and many received Christ as Savior.
Acts chapter 13–14, Paul and Barnabas had a very fruitful ministry among the Gentiles. All of these Gentiles turning to faith in Christ caused concern among the Jewish believers, first expressed in Acts 11:1–18, and the issues that caused concern were ultimately decided upon at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).
The issues centered on two questions:
Do Gentiles first have to become Jews before they can become Christians?
Do Gentiles have to observe the Mosaic Law after they become Christians?
[Today = how Jewish-like should believers be. "Yashua"/Jehovah, Shofar]
- The decree from the council:
Ask Gentile converts Not to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols
Not to eat meat with blood in it
Not to eat animals which had been strangled
Not to commit sexual immorality (Acts 15:28–29).
(These requirements may all be taken from Leviticus 17–18, which set up requirements not only on the "house of Israel" but also on "the strangers which sojourn among you" (Lev. 17:8).

Did these behaviors bring about salvation?

Why were these decided upon? What was the benefit?

These were not rules the Gentiles must follow in order to be saved.

Rather, the rules were to build harmony between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the first century.
(To produce fellowship opportunities)

What "Laws" are held up today as a way to obtain salvation? Or to become/be more of a Christian?

"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." MacArthur



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- First to be Martyred (AD 43)

Acts 12:1-3

12 About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. ² He killed James the brother of John with the sword, ³ and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread (Passover)

- The one place in scripture where James is not listed with John or any other Apostle.
- He was beheaded
- Why did Peter receive a miracle that kept him alive and James the Greater did not?

By Herod Agrippa I

Was James passionate, aggressive style that stir things up so that he made deadly enemies very rapidly?

Role Models: Elijah, Nehemiah was similarly passionate (cf. Nehemiah 13:25), John the Baptist they all were **outspoken, intense, and impatient with evildoers.**

Herod Agrippa I: (AD 10–44) was the grandson of Herod the Great, but had been raised in the city of Rome and was on intimate terms with Emperors Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. He was, then, more Roman than Palestinian. His favored status eventually allowed him to be given control over most of Palestine by AD 41 (Josephus, *Antiquities* 19.274–77), his territories exceeding that of his grandfather. He was also allowed to use the title “king” (βασιλεύς, *basileus*; Acts 12:1). Agrippa’s death in AD 44 ended this meteoric rise to power, and his realm was divided again into smaller administrative units by Romans ruled by Roman governors.

- Herod Antipas, the one who killed John the Baptist and put Jesus on trial; this was his nephew and successor, Herod Agrippa I.
 - Was this why he was so hostile to the Church? His Uncle’s legacy?
- Herod’s Saavy - use the tensions between the church and the Jewish religious leaders to his political advantage.
 - A campaign of harassment against Christians
 - Murder of James
 - When he saw how this pleased the Jewish leaders, he decided to target Peter as well.
 - Acts 12:19 – Prison guards killed because Peter escaped
 - Went to Caesarea
 - ACCEPTED Worship due to the LORD: “The people kept shouting, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’ Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died” (**Acts 12:22–23**).

²² And the people were shouting, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!” ²³ Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

History records that James’s testimony bore fruit right up until the moment of his execution. Eusebius, the early church historian, passes on an account of James’s death that came from Clement of Alexandria: “[Clement] says that 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. They were both therefore, he says, led away together; and on the way 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.”



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Acts 12:4-25

⁴ And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. ⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Peter Is Rescued

⁶ Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. ⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. ⁸ And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." ⁹ And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. ¹¹ When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

¹² When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³ And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. ¹⁵ They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" ¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers."^[a] Then he departed and went to another place. ¹⁸ Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

The Death of Herod

²⁰ Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain,^[b] they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food. ²¹ On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. ²² And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" ²³ Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

²⁴ But the word of God increased and multiplied.

²⁵ And Barnabas and Saul returned from^[c] Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

NO SMALL GROUP:

One word that describes James = Passion



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FOR US PERSONALLY:

Practice a bit of JAMES in our lives:

Praying for his passion that was trained by Christ and harnessed by the Holy Spirit to become

BOLDNESS:

Acts 4:1-31

Peter and John Before the Council

4 And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them,² greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.³ And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.⁴ But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

⁵ On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem,⁶ with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family.⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?”⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders,⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed,¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well.¹¹ This Jesus^[a] is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.^[b]¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men^[c] by which we must be saved.”

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.¹⁴ But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.¹⁵ But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another,¹⁶ saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.¹⁷ But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.”¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge,²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”²¹ And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened.²² For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

The Believers Pray for Boldness

²³ When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant,^[d] said by the Holy Spirit,

*“Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?*

*²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed^[e]—*

²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.



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Notes:

PODCAST

The Samaritan Connection (Twelve Ordinary Men)

Where Jesus' mindset was:

Jesus was preparing to pass through Samaria. He was headed to Jerusalem for the final Passover, which He knew would culminate in His death, burial, and resurrection.

It was significant that Jesus chose to travel through Samaria. Even though the shortest route from Galilee to Jerusalem went right through Samaria, most Jews traveling between those two places deliberately took a route that required them to travel many miles out of the way through the barren desert of Perea—requiring them to cross the Jordan twice—just so that they could avoid Samaria.

The Samaritans were the mixed-race offspring of Israelites from the Northern Kingdom. When Israel was conquered by the Assyrians, the most prominent and influential people in their tribes were taken into captivity, and the land was resettled with pagans and foreigners who were loyal to the Assyrian king (2 Kings 17:24–34). Poor Israelites who remained in the land intermarried with those pagans.

From the very beginning, the interloping pagans did not prosper in the land because they did not fear the Lord. So the king of Assyria sent back one of the priests whom he had taken captive, in order to teach people how to fear the Lord (2 Kings 17:28). The result was a religion that blended elements of truth and paganism. "They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods; according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away" (v. 33). In other words, they still claimed to worship Jehovah as God (and ostensibly they accepted the Pentateuch as Scripture), but they founded their own priesthood, built their own temple, and devised a sacrificial system of their own making. In short, they made a new religion based in large part on pagan traditions. The Samaritans' religion is a classic example of what happens when the authority of Scripture is subjugated to human tradition.

The original site of the Samaritans' temple was on Mount Gerizim, in Samaria. That temple was built during the time of Alexander the Great, but it had been destroyed about one hundred twenty-five years before the birth of Christ. Gerizim was still deemed holy by the Samaritans, however, and they were convinced the mountain was the only place where God could properly be worshiped. That is why the Samaritan woman in John 4:20 said to Jesus, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Obviously, this was one of the chief points under dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans. (To this day a small group of the Samaritans' descendants still worship on Mount Gerizim.)

Many of the original Israelites' descendants who later returned to Samaria from captivity were also the product of intermarriage with pagans, so the culture of Samaria suited them perfectly. Of course, the Jews regarded the Samaritans as a mongrel race and their religion as a mongrel religion. That is why, during the time of Christ, such pains were taken to avoid all travel through Samaria. The entire region was deemed unclean.

But in this instance, Jesus' face was set for Jerusalem, and as He had done before (John 4:4), He chose the more direct route through Samaria. Along the way, He and His followers would need places to eat and spend the night. Since the party traveling with Jesus was fairly large, He sent messengers ahead to arrange accommodations.

Because it was obvious that Jesus was headed for Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and the Samaritans were of the opinion that all such feasts and ceremonies ought to be observed on Mount Gerizim, Jesus' messengers were refused all accommodations. The Samaritans not only hated the Jews, but they also hated the worship that took place in Jerusalem. They therefore had no interest in Christ's agenda at all. He represented everything Jewish that they despised. So they summarily rejected the request. The problem was not that there was no room for them in the inn; the problem was that the Samaritans were being deliberately inhospitable. If Jesus intended to pass through their city on His way to Jerusalem to worship, they were going to make it as hard as possible for Him. They hated the Jews and their worship as much as the Jews hated them and their worship. As far as the Samaritans were concerned, turnabout was fair play.

Of course, Jesus had never shown anything but goodwill toward the Samaritans. He had healed a Samaritan's leprosy and commended that man for his gratefulness (Luke 17:16). He had accepted water from a Samaritan woman and given her the water of life (John 4:7–29). He had stayed in that woman's village for two days, evangelizing her neighbors (John 4:39–43). He had made a Samaritan the hero of one of His best-known parables (Luke 10:30–37). Later He would command His disciples to preach the gospel in Samaria (Acts 1:8). He had always been full of kindness and goodwill toward the Samaritans.

But now they were treating Him with deliberate contempt.

James and John, the Sons of Thunder, were instantly filled with passionate outrage. They already had in mind a remedy for this situation. They said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" (Luke 9:54).

The reference to Elijah was full of significance. The incident to which James and John were referring had taken place in this very region. They were familiar with the Old Testament account, and they knew its historical relevance to Samaria. We see here how deeply the Jews felt their resentment toward Samaria.

It was a matter of historical fact that the name of Samaria had been associated with idolatry and apostasy long before the Assyrian conquest. Samaria was originally the name of one of the most important cities in the Northern Kingdom. During Ahab's reign, in the days of Elijah, Samaria was turned into a center for Baal-worship (1 Kings 16:32). This was also where Ahab had built his famous ivory palace (1 Kings 22:39; cf. Amos 3:12–15).



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Ahab's palace became the permanent residence for subsequent kings of the Northern Kingdom. In fact, it was the very place where King Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber and was seriously injured (2 Kings 1:2).

A lattice is a screen or a grate made of crisscrossed wooden strips. This could have been a decorative window covering. More likely it was a flimsy substitute for a parapet around the perimeter of the roof. Apparently, Ahaziah carelessly backed into some latticework or stupidly leaned on it, and when it gave way, he fell to the ground from the upper level of the palace.

Ahaziah was the son and successor of Ahab. His mother, Jezebel, was still living during his reign and still exercising her evil influence through her son's throne. When Ahaziah's accident occurred, the injuries were apparently life-threatening, and he wanted to know his fate. So he dispatched messengers, telling them, "Go, inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury" (v. 2).

Inquiring of soothsayers was strictly forbidden by Moses' law, of course (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Seeking prophecies from fortune-tellers who were associated with Baal-Zebub was even worse. Baal-Zebub was a Philistine deity. His name meant "lord of the flies." The land of the Philistines was thick with flies, and the Philistines believed the lord of the flies lived in their land, so they made this fly-god one of their main deities. They had some famous oracles who claimed to be able to tell the future. They usually gave flattering prophecies with predictions so ambiguous they could hardly miss, but those oracles nonetheless had gained fame throughout Israel. They were the "Psychic Friends Network" of Elijah's time.

But Baal-Zebub was as vile a deity as anyone ever invented. He supposedly ruled the flies—those abhorrent insects that swarm around every kind of decay and filth and spread disease and spawn maggots. It was a fitting image for this kind of god. Who would ever think of worshiping a deity whose realm was everything foul and unclean? Such a god was so revolting to the Jews that they altered the name Baal-Zebub slightly to make it "Beelzebul," which means "god of dung." This vile being epitomized everything impure and unholy—everything that opposes the true God. (That is why, by the time of Jesus, the name Beelzebul had become a way to refer to Satan—Luke 11:15.) This was the god from whom Ahaziah sought knowledge of the future.

So the Lord sent Elijah to intercept the messengers. Scripture says, "The angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, 'Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?"' " (2 Kings 1:3). The angel also gave Ahab a solemn message for the injured king: "Now therefore, thus says the LORD: 'You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die'" (v. 4).

Elijah did as he was told and sent the prophecy back to Ahaziah via the king's messengers. The messengers did not even know who Elijah was. When they reported back to the king, they simply told him the prophecy had been given them by "a man [who] came up to meet us" (v. 6).

Ahaziah asked, "What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these words?" (v. 7).

They answered, "A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist" (v. 8).

Ahaziah instantly knew who it was: "It is Elijah the Tishbite" (v. 8).

Elijah had been Ahab and Jezebel's nemesis for years, so he was well known to Ahaziah. Naturally, Ahaziah hated him and probably decided then and there to kill him. So he sent "a captain of fifty with his fifty men" to confront Elijah (v. 9). The fact that Ahaziah sent so many soldiers is proof his intentions were not peaceful. Their orders were probably to arrest him and bring him back to Ahaziah so that the king could actually witness Elijah's execution and gloat over it.

"So [the captain of the fifty] went up to him; and there he was, sitting on the top of a hill" (v. 9). Elijah was totally unfazed by the size of the regiment that came to get him. He wasn't hiding or running from them; he was sitting placidly atop the hill, where they would be sure to find him.

The captain spoke: "Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down!'" (v. 9).

Elijah's reply was to the point: " 'If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.' And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty" (v. 10). The Hebrew expression suggests that the entire company was utterly consumed, reduced to ashes in an instant. This apparently occurred in the presence of witnesses, who reported the matter back to the king.

But Ahaziah was a foolishly stubborn man. "Then he sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty men. And he answered and said to him: 'Man of God, thus has the king said, "Come down quickly!"' So Elijah answered and said to them, 'If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.' And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty" (vv. 11-12).

Incredibly, Ahaziah was not through. He sent another company of fifty men. But the captain of this third group was wise. He approached Elijah humbly and pleaded for the lives of his men. So this time the angel of the Lord instructed Elijah to go with the soldiers and confront Ahaziah personally. Elijah went with them and delivered the message of doom to Ahaziah personally.

And Ahaziah died "according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken" (vv. 13-17).

All of that had taken place in the very region through which Jesus proposed to travel to Jerusalem. The story of Elijah's fiery triumph was well known to the disciples. It was one of the classic Old Testament episodes they would have been reminded of merely by traveling through that district.

So when James and John suggested fire from heaven as a fitting response to the Samaritans' inhospitality, they probably thought they were standing on solid precedent. After all, Elijah was not condemned for his actions. On the contrary, at that time and under those circumstances, it was the appropriate response from Elijah.

But it was not a proper response for James and John. In the first place, their motives were wrong. A tone of arrogance is evident in the way they asked the question: "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" Of course, they did not have the power to call down fire from heaven. Christ was the only one in their company who had such power. If that were an appropriate response, He could well have done it Himself. James and John were brazenly



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suggesting that He should give them power to call down fire. Christ Himself had been challenged many times by His adversaries to produce such cosmic miracles, and He had always declined (cf. Matthew 12:39). James and John were in effect asking Jesus to enable them to do what they knew He would not do.

Furthermore, Jesus' mission was very different from Elijah's. Christ had come to save, not to destroy. Therefore He responded to the Boanerges Brothers with a firm reproof: "But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them'" (Luke 9:55–56).

After all this time with Jesus, how could they have missed the spirit of so much He had taught? "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He was on a mission of rescue, not judgment. Although He had every right to demand absolute worship, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). Jesus Himself had said, "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world" (John 12:46–47).

Jerusalem, Council of First Apostolic Council of the Christian church, held in Jerusalem headed by St. James the Great, at which it was decided that Gentiles need not be circumcised or be forced to keep the Mosaic Law (Acts 15).²

James, St. The Lord's brother, possibly the son of the Virgin Mary and an apostle. He was granted a special appearance of the Lord after the Resurrection. He was with St. Peter, a leader of the church at Jerusalem. He was put to death by the Sanhedrin in 62. Feast day: October 23.

James the Great, St. Apostle. Son of Zebedee, elder brother of John, named Boanerges, that is "Son of Thunder," by the Lord. He was the first of the 12 to suffer martyrdom when he was beheaded by Herod Agrippa in 44. According to Spanish legends, his body was translated to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Feast day: April 30 (Eastern Church); July 25 (Western Church).

James the Less, St. Son of Alphaeus, one of the 12 disciples. Feast day: May 3 (Western Church); October 9 (Eastern Church).³

JAMES, SON OF ZEBEDEE (Ἰάκωβος, *lakōbos*). A member of Jesus' inner circle of disciples. The brother of John. Not to be confused with James, brother of Jesus or James, son of Alphaeus. Later Christian tradition called him "James the Greater."

Biblical Relevance

James first appears in Scripture in Matt 4:21, when Jesus calls him and his brother John to become disciples. Each of the Synoptic Gospels identify James as an early disciple of Jesus (**Matt 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:10–11**). He goes on to become one of the disciples of Jesus' inner circle, along with Peter and John (e.g., Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). However, James did not go on to become a central figure in the early church.

Mark 1:20 records that upon receiving Jesus' call to follow Him, James and John left their father with "the hired men" or "servants." This has led Stein and Black to theorize that James grew up in a relatively affluent family, one able to hire outside help (Stein, *Mark*, 80; Black, *Mark*, 70). Marcus similarly believes this statement "is a realistic detail that suggests the middle-class status of these apostles." He further speculates that Mark may have included it "to reassure the reader that James and John did not leave their father totally helpless" (Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 181).

Luke 5:10 describes James and John as Peter's "partners" (κοινωνοὶ, *koinōnoi*), suggesting the three of them may have worked together in business (see Bock, *Luke*, 1:460, who cites Schürmann, *Luke*, 270). Jesus' choice to call Andrew, Peter, James, and John makes sense in that they all knew one another and worked together (see Stein, *Mark*, 79).

² Kurian, G. T. (2001). In *Nelson's new Christian dictionary: the authoritative resource on the Christian world*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

³ Kurian, G. T. (2001). In *Nelson's new Christian dictionary: the authoritative resource on the Christian world*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.



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Mark 3:17 records that “[Jesus] gave [James and John] the name ‘*Boanērges*,’ which means ‘sons of thunder’ ” (NIV). In Marcus’ view, this epithet “may hint at the hot temper that the sons of Zebedee will later display” (Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 269; see also Stein, *Mark*, 172). As support, Marcus points to Luke 9:54, which records that when some Samaritans refused to receive Jesus into their town, James and John asked Jesus, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (NASB; see also Mark 9:38; Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 269).

In Mark 10:35–37 James and John ask Jesus if they can rule next to Him in His kingdom. Jesus responds by asking, “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:38 NIV). Marcus argues that Mark’s community would have understood this statement as an allusion to James’ martyrdom by Agrippa I around AD 44 (see Acts 12:2; Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 754).

The Name James

In place of a surname, the New Testament identifies James by his relation to his father, Zebedee (Mark 1:19), as was the common practice among Jews of the ancient world. The Greek name Ἰάκωβος (*Iakōbos*) would be more properly transliterated as Jacobus or perhaps Jacob. Marcus offers the following explanation: “The etymological process of transformation is roughly: Gk *Iakōbos* to Latin *Jacobus* to Late Latin *Jacomus*... to [still Late Latin] *Jāmes*... to [English] James” (Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 181). Marcus further argues that the Gospels mention Zebedee “in order to distinguish James and John from two other famous people with the same names, James the Lord’s brother and John the Baptist” (Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 180–81). James is usually mentioned before John, possibly indicating he was the older brother (Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 180; Stein, *Mark*, 79).

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CHRIS KUGLER⁴

4

JAMES—THE APOSTLE OF PASSION

Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

—ACTS 12:1–2

Of the three disciples in Jesus’ closest inner circle, James is the least familiar to us. The biblical account is practically devoid of any explicit details about his life and character. He never appears as a stand-alone character in the Gospel accounts, but he is always paired with his younger and better-known brother, John. The only time he is mentioned by himself is in the book of Acts, where his martyrdom is recorded.

This relative silence about James is ironic, because from a human perspective, he might have seemed the logical one to dominate the group. Between James and John, James was the eldest. (That is doubtless why his name always appears first when those two names appear together.) And between the two sets of brothers, the family of James and John seems to have been much more prominent than the family of Peter and Andrew. This is hinted at by the fact that James and John are often referred to simply as “the sons of Zebedee” (Matthew 20:20; 26:37; 27:56; Mark 10:35; Luke 5:10; John 21:2)—signifying that Zebedee was a man of some importance.

⁴ Kugler, C. (2016). [James, Son of Zebedee](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



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Zebedee's prestige might have stemmed from his financial success, his family lineage, or both. He was apparently quite well-to-do. His fishing business was large enough to employ multiple hired servants (Mark 1:20). Moreover, Zebedee's entire family had enough status that the apostle John "was known to the high priest," and that is how John was able to get Peter admitted to the high priest's courtyard on the night of Jesus' arrest (John 18:15–16). There is some evidence from the early church record that Zebedee was a Levite and closely related to the high priest's family. Whatever the reason for Zebedee's prominence, it is clear from Scripture that he was a man of importance, and his family's reputation reached from Galilee all the way to the high priest's household in Jerusalem.

James, as the elder brother from such a prominent family, might have felt that by all rights he ought to have been the chief apostle. Indeed, that may be one of the main reasons there were so many disputes about "which of them should be considered the greatest" (Luke 22:24). But James never did actually take first place among the apostles except in one regard: He was the first to be martyred.

James is a much more significant figure than we might consider, based on the little we know about him. In two of the lists of apostles his name comes immediately after Peter's (Mark 3:16–19; Acts 1:13). So there is good reason to assume he was a strong leader—and probably second in influence after Peter.

Of course, James also figures prominently in the close inner circle of three. He, Peter, and John were the only ones Jesus permitted to go with Him when He raised Jairus's daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37). The same group of three witnessed Jesus' glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1). James was among four disciples who questioned Jesus privately on the Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3). And he was included again with John and Peter when the Lord urged those three to pray with Him privately in Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). So as a member of the small inner circle, he was privileged to witness Jesus' *power* in the raising of the dead, he saw His *glory* when Jesus was transfigured, he saw Christ's *sovereignty* in the way the Lord unfolded the future to them on the Mount of Olives, and he saw the Savior's *agony* in the garden. All of these events must have strengthened his faith immensely and equipped him for the suffering and martyrdom he himself would eventually face.

If there's a key word that applies to the life of the apostle James, that word is *passion*. From the little we know about him, it is obvious that he was a man of intense fervor and intensity. In fact, Jesus gave James and John a nickname: *Boanerges*—"Sons of Thunder." That defines James's personality in very vivid terms. He was zealous, thunderous, passionate, and fervent. He reminds us of Jehu in the Old Testament, who was known for driving his chariot at breakneck speed (2 Kings 9:20), and who said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD"—then annihilated the house of Ahab and swept away Baal-worship from the land. But Jehu's passion was a passion out of control, and his "zeal for the Lord" turned out to be tainted with selfish, worldly ambition and the most bloodthirsty kinds of cruelty. Scripture says, "Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart; for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin" (2 Kings 10:31). The apostle James's zeal was mixed with similar ambitious and bloodthirsty tendencies (though in much milder doses), and he may have even been headed down a similar road to ruin when Jesus met him. But by God's grace, he was transformed into a man of God and became one of the leading apostles.

Mark, who records that Jesus called James and John "Sons of Thunder," includes that fact in his list of the Twelve, mentioning it in the same way he notes that Simon was named Peter (Mark 3:17). We don't know how often Jesus employed His nickname for James and John; Mark's mention of it is the only time it appears in all of Scripture. Unlike Peter's name, which was obviously intended to help encourage and shape Peter's character toward a rocklike steadfastness, "Boanerges" seems to have been bestowed on the sons of Zebedee to chide them when they allowed their naturally feverish temperaments to get out of hand. Perhaps the Lord even used it for humorous effect while employing it as a gentle admonishment.

What little we know about James underscores the fact that he had a fiery, vehement disposition. While Andrew was quietly bringing individuals to Jesus, James was wishing he could call down fire from heaven and destroy whole villages of people. Even the fact that James was the first to be martyred—and that his martyrdom was accomplished by no less a figure than Herod—suggests that James was not a passive or subtle man, but rather he had a style that stirred things up, so that he made deadly enemies very rapidly.

There is a legitimate place in spiritual leadership for people who have thunderous personalities. Elijah was that kind of character. (Indeed, Elijah was the role model James thought he was following when he pleaded for



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fire from heaven.) Nehemiah was similarly passionate (cf. Nehemiah 13:25). John the Baptist had a fiery temperament, too. James apparently was cut from similar fabric. He was outspoken, intense, and impatient with evildoers.

There is nothing inherently wrong with such zeal. Remember that Jesus Himself made a whip and cleansed the temple. And when he did, “His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up’ ” (John 2:17; cf. Psalm 69:9). James of all people knew what it was to be eaten up with zeal for the Lord. Much of what James saw Jesus do probably helped stoke his zeal—such as when the Lord rebuked the Jewish leaders, when He cursed the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, and when He confronted and destroyed demonic powers. Zeal is a virtue when it is truly zeal for righteousness’ sake.

But sometimes zeal is less than righteous. Zeal apart from knowledge can be damning (cf. Romans 10:2). Zeal without wisdom is dangerous. Zeal mixed with insensitivity is often cruel. Whenever zeal disintegrates into uncontrolled passion, it can be deadly. And James sometimes had a tendency to let such misguided zeal get the better of him. Two incidents in particular illustrate this. One is the episode where James wanted to call down fire. The other is the time James and John enlisted their mother’s help to lobby for the highest seats in the kingdom. Let’s look at these individually.

FIRE FROM HEAVEN

We get our best glimpse of why James and John were known as the Sons of Thunder in Luke 9:51–56. Jesus was preparing to pass through Samaria. He was headed to Jerusalem for the final Passover, which He knew would culminate in His death, burial, and resurrection. Luke writes, “Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem” (vv. 51–53).

It was significant that Jesus chose to travel through Samaria. Even though the shortest route from Galilee to Jerusalem went right through Samaria, most Jews traveling between those two places deliberately took a route that required them to travel many miles out of the way through the barren desert of Perea—requiring them to cross the Jordan twice—just so that they could avoid Samaria.

The Samaritans were the mixed-race offspring of Israelites from the Northern Kingdom. When Israel was conquered by the Assyrians, the most prominent and influential people in their tribes were taken into captivity, and the land was resettled with pagans and foreigners who were loyal to the Assyrian king (2 Kings 17:24–34). Poor Israelites who remained in the land intermarried with those pagans.

From the very beginning, the interloping pagans did not prosper in the land because they did not fear the Lord. So the king of Assyria sent back one of the priests whom he had taken captive, in order to teach people how to fear the Lord (2 Kings 17:28). The result was a religion that blended elements of truth and paganism. “They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods; according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away” (v. 33). In other words, they still claimed to worship Jehovah as God (and ostensibly they accepted the Pentateuch as Scripture), but they founded their own priesthood, built their own temple, and devised a sacrificial system of their own making. In short, they made a new religion based in large part on pagan traditions. The Samaritans’ religion is a classic example of what happens when the authority of Scripture is subjugated to human tradition.

The original site of the Samaritans’ temple was on Mount Gerizim, in Samaria. That temple was built during the time of Alexander the Great, but it had been destroyed about one hundred twenty-five years before the birth of Christ. Gerizim was still deemed holy by the Samaritans, however, and they were convinced the mountain was the only place where God could properly be worshiped. That is why the Samaritan woman in John 4:20 said to Jesus, “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.” Obviously, this was one of the chief points under dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans. (To this day a small group of the Samaritans’ descendants still worship on Mount Gerizim.)

Many of the original Israelites’ descendants who later returned to Samaria from captivity were also the product of intermarriage with pagans, so the culture of Samaria suited them perfectly. Of course, the Jews regarded the Samaritans as a mongrel race and their religion as a mongrel religion. That is why, during the time of Christ, such pains were taken to avoid all travel through Samaria. The entire region was deemed unclean.

But in this instance, Jesus’ face was set for Jerusalem, and as He had done before (John 4:4), He chose the more direct route through Samaria. Along the way, He and His followers would need places to eat and spend the night. Since the party traveling with Jesus was fairly large, He sent messengers ahead to arrange accommodations.

Because it was obvious that Jesus was headed for Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and the Samaritans were of the opinion that all such feasts and ceremonies ought to be observed on Mount Gerizim, Jesus’ messengers were refused all accommodations. The Samaritans not only hated the Jews, but they also hated the worship that took place



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in Jerusalem. They therefore had no interest in Christ's agenda at all. He represented everything Jewish that they despised. So they summarily rejected the request. The problem was not that there was no room for them in the inn; the problem was that the Samaritans were being deliberately inhospitable. If Jesus intended to pass through their city on His way to Jerusalem to worship, they were going to make it as hard as possible for Him. They hated the Jews and their worship as much as the Jews hated them and their worship. As far as the Samaritans were concerned, turnabout was fair play.

Of course, Jesus had never shown anything but goodwill toward the Samaritans. He had healed a Samaritan's leprosy and commended that man for his gratefulness (Luke 17:16). He had accepted water from a Samaritan woman and given her the water of life (John 4:7–29). He had stayed in that woman's village for two days, evangelizing her neighbors (John 4:39–43). He had made a Samaritan the hero of one of His best-known parables (Luke 10:30–37). Later He would command His disciples to preach the gospel in Samaria (Acts 1:8). He had always been full of kindness and goodwill toward the Samaritans.

But now they were treating Him with deliberate contempt.

James and John, the Sons of Thunder, were instantly filled with passionate outrage. They already had in mind a remedy for this situation. They said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" (Luke 9:54).

The reference to Elijah was full of significance. The incident to which James and John were referring had taken place in this very region. They were familiar with the Old Testament account, and they knew its historical relevance to Samaria. We see here how deeply the Jews felt their resentment toward Samaria.

It was a matter of historical fact that the name of Samaria had been associated with idolatry and apostasy long before the Assyrian conquest. Samaria was originally the name of one of the most important cities in the Northern Kingdom. During Ahab's reign, in the days of Elijah, Samaria was turned into a center for Baal-worship (1 Kings 16:32). This was also where Ahab had built his famous ivory palace (1 Kings 22:39; cf. Amos 3:12–15).

Ahab's palace became the permanent residence for subsequent kings of the Northern Kingdom. In fact, it was the very place where King Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber and was seriously injured (2 Kings 1:2).

A lattice is a screen or a grate made of crisscrossed wooden strips. This could have been a decorative window covering. More likely it was a flimsy substitute for a parapet around the perimeter of the roof. Apparently, Ahaziah carelessly backed into some latticework or stupidly leaned on it, and when it gave way, he fell to the ground from the upper level of the palace.

Ahaziah was the son and successor of Ahab. His mother, Jezebel, was still living during his reign and still exercising her evil influence through her son's throne. When Ahaziah's accident occurred, the injuries were apparently life-threatening, and he wanted to know his fate. So he dispatched messengers, telling them, "Go, inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury" (v. 2).

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But Baal-Zebub was as vile a deity as anyone ever invented. He supposedly ruled the flies—those abhorrent insects that swarm around every kind of decay and filth and spread disease and spawn maggots. It was a fitting image for this kind of god. Who would ever think of worshiping a deity whose realm was everything foul and unclean? Such a god was so revolting to the Jews that they altered the name Baal-Zebub slightly to make it "Beelzebub," which means "god of dung." This vile being epitomized everything impure and unholy—everything that opposes the true God. (That is why, by the time of Jesus, the name Beelzebub had become a way to refer to Satan—Luke 11:15.) This was the god from whom Ahaziah sought knowledge of the future.

So the Lord sent Elijah to intercept the messengers. Scripture says, "The angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, 'Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?" ' " (2 Kings 1:3). The angel also gave Ahab a solemn message for the injured king: "Now therefore, thus says the LORD: 'You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die' " (v. 4).

Elijah did as he was told and sent the prophecy back to Ahaziah via the king's messengers. The messengers did not even know who Elijah was. When they reported back to the king, they simply told him the prophecy had been given them by "a man [who] came up to meet us" (v. 6).



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Ahaziah asked, “What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these words?” (v. 7).

They answered, “A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist” (v. 8).

Ahaziah instantly knew who it was: “It is Elijah the Tishbite” (v. 8).

Elijah had been Ahab and Jezebel’s nemesis for years, so he was well known to Ahaziah. Naturally, Ahaziah hated him and probably decided then and there to kill him. So he sent “a captain of fifty with his fifty men” to confront Elijah (v. 9). The fact that Ahaziah sent so many soldiers is proof his intentions were not peaceful. Their orders were probably to arrest him and bring him back to Ahaziah so that the king could actually witness Elijah’s execution and gloat over it.

“So [the captain of the fifty] went up to him; and there he was, sitting on the top of a hill” (v. 9). Elijah was totally unfazed by the size of the regiment that came to get him. He wasn’t hiding or running from them; he was sitting placidly atop the hill, where they would be sure to find him.

The captain spoke: “Man of God, the king has said, ‘Come down!’ ” (v. 9).

Elijah’s reply was to the point: “ ‘If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.’ And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty” (v. 10). The Hebrew expression suggests that the entire company was utterly consumed, reduced to ashes in an instant. This apparently occurred in the presence of witnesses, who reported the matter back to the king.

But Ahaziah was a foolishly stubborn man. “Then he sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty men. And he answered and said to him: ‘Man of God, thus has the king said, “Come down quickly!” ’ So Elijah answered and said to them, ‘If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.’ And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty” (vv. 11–12).

Incredibly, Ahaziah was not through. He sent another company of fifty men. But the captain of this third group was wise. He approached Elijah humbly and pleaded for the lives of his men. So this time the angel of the Lord instructed Elijah to go with the soldiers and confront Ahaziah personally. Elijah went with them and delivered the message of doom to Ahaziah personally.

And Ahaziah died “according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken” (vv. 13–17).

All of that had taken place in the very region through which Jesus proposed to travel to Jerusalem. The story of Elijah’s fiery triumph was well known to the disciples. It was one of the classic Old Testament episodes they would have been reminded of merely by traveling through that district.

So when James and John suggested fire from heaven as a fitting response to the Samaritans’ inhospitality, they probably thought they were standing on solid precedent. After all, Elijah was not condemned for his actions. On the contrary, at that time and under those circumstances, it was the appropriate response from Elijah.

But it was not a proper response for James and John. In the first place, their motives were wrong. A tone of arrogance is evident in the way they asked the question: “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?” Of course, they did not have the power to call down fire from heaven. Christ was the only one in their company who had such power. If that were an appropriate response, He could well have done it Himself. James and John were brazenly suggesting that He should give them power to call down fire. Christ Himself had been challenged many times by His adversaries to produce such cosmic miracles, and He had always declined (cf. Matthew 12:39). James and John were in effect asking Jesus to enable them to do what they knew He would not do.

Furthermore, Jesus’ mission was very different from Elijah’s. Christ had come to save, not to destroy. Therefore He responded to the Boanerges Brothers with a firm reproof: “But He turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them’ ” (Luke 9:55–56).

After all this time with Jesus, how could they have missed the spirit of so much He had taught? “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He was on a mission of rescue, not judgment. Although He had every right to demand absolute worship, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). Jesus Himself had said, “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world” (John 12:46–47).

Of course, a time is coming when Christ *will* judge the world. Scripture says He will be “revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting



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destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7–9). But this was not the time or the place for that.

As Solomon wrote, “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven... A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up ... a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones ... a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace” (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8). James and John momentarily forgot that “now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Perhaps, however, there is a touch of nobility in their indignation against the Samaritans. Their zeal to defend Christ’s honor is surely a great virtue. It is far better to get fired up with righteous wrath than to sit passively and endure insults against Christ. So their resentment over seeing Christ deliberately slighted is admirable in some measure, even though their reaction was tainted with arrogance and their proposed remedy to the problem was completely out of line.

Note also that Jesus was not by any means condemning what Elijah had done in his day. Nor was our Lord advocating a purely pacifist approach to every conflict. What Elijah did he did for the sake of God’s glory and with God’s express approval. That fire from heaven was a public display of *God’s* wrath (not Elijah’s), and it was a deservedly severe judgment against an unthinkable evil regime that had sat on Israel’s throne for generations. Such extreme wickedness called for extreme measures of judgment.

Of course, such instant destruction would be fitting every time anyone sinned, if that were how God chose to deal with us. But, thankfully, it ordinarily is not. “His tender mercies are over all His works” (Psalm 145:9). He is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6). He has “no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Jesus’ example taught James that loving-kindness and mercy are virtues to be cultivated as much as (and sometimes more than) righteous indignation and fiery zeal. Notice what happened. Instead of calling down fire from heaven, “They went to another village” (Luke 9:56). They simply found accommodations elsewhere. It was a little inconvenient, perhaps, but far better and far more appropriate in those circumstances than James and John’s proposed remedy for the Samaritans’ inhospitality.

A few years after this, as the early church began to grow and the gospel message spread beyond Judea, Philip the deacon “went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them” (Acts 8:5). A marvelous thing happened. “The multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city” (vv. 6–8).

Undoubtedly, many who were saved under **Philip’s** preaching were some of the same people whom Jesus spared when James had wanted to incinerate them. And we can be certain that even James himself rejoiced greatly in the salvation of so many who once had dishonored Christ so flagrantly.

THRONES IN THE KINGDOM

We get another insight into James’s character in Matthew 20:20–24. Here we discover that James was not only fervent, passionate, zealous, and insensitive; he was also ambitious and overconfident. And in this case, he and his brother John engaged in a furtive attempt to gain status over the other apostles:

Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She said to Him, “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.” But Jesus answered and said, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They said to Him, “We are able.” So He said to them, “You will indeed drink 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 is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.” And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.



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Mark also records this incident, but he doesn't mention that James and John enlisted their mother's intercession. Although Matthew records that she is the one who made this request of Jesus, a comparison with Mark's account makes it clear that she was put up to it by her sons.

By comparing Matthew 27:56 with Mark 16:1, we further discover that the mother of James and John was named Salome. She was one of "many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him" (Matthew 27:55)—meaning that they supplied financial support and probably helped prepare meals (cf. Luke 8:1–3). Because of the family's affluence, Salome would have been able to join her sons for extended periods of time, traveling with the company that followed Jesus everywhere and helping meet logistical, practical, and financial needs.

The idea for Salome's bold request was undoubtedly hatched in the minds of James and John because of Jesus' promise in Matthew 19:28: "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Jesus immediately followed up that promise with a reminder that "Many who are first will be last, and the last first" (v. 30). But it was the promise of thrones that caught the attention of James and John. So they decided to have their mother request that they be given the most prominent thrones.

They were already in the intimate circle of three. They had been disciples as long as anyone. They probably thought of numerous reasons why they deserved this honor, so why not simply ask for it?

For her part, Salome was clearly a willing participant. Obviously she had encouraged her sons' ambitions, which may help explain where some of their attitudes came from.

Jesus' reply subtly reminded them that suffering is the prelude to glory: "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Although He had explained to them numerous times that He was about to be crucified, they clearly did not understand what kind of baptism He meant. They had no real concept of what was stirring in the cup He was asking them to drink.

So, of course, in their foolish, ambitious self-confidence, they assured Him, "We are able." They were clamoring for honor and position, so they were *still* eager to hear Him promise them those highest thrones.

But He did not make that promise. Instead, He assured them that they would indeed drink His cup and be baptized with the same baptism he was about to undergo. (At that moment they could not have appreciated what they had just volunteered for.) But the chief thrones, Jesus said, were not necessarily part of the bargain. "To sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father" (Matthew 20:23).

Their ambition ultimately created conflicts among the apostles, because the other ten heard about it and were displeased. The question of who deserved the most prominent thrones became the big debate among them, and they carried it right to the table at the Last Supper (Luke 22:24).

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.

A CUP OF SUFFERING

The end of James's story from an earthly perspective is recorded in Acts 12:1–3: "Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also."

Remember, this is the one place in Scripture where James appears alone, apart from even his brother. Few details of James's martyrdom are given. Scripture records that Herod was the one who had him killed and that the instrument of execution was a sword (meaning, of course, that he was beheaded). This was not Herod Antipas, the one who killed John the Baptist and put Jesus on trial; this was his nephew and successor, Herod Agrippa I. We don't know why this Herod would be so hostile to the church. Of course, it was well known that his uncle had participated in the conspiracy to kill Christ, so the preaching of the cross would surely have been an embarrassment to the Herodian Dynasty per se (cf. Acts 4:27). In addition to that, it is clear that Herod wanted to use the tensions between the church and the Jewish religious leaders to his political advantage. He began with a campaign of harassment against Christians and soon moved to murder. When he saw how this pleased the Jewish leaders, he decided to target Peter as well.

Peter miraculously escaped, and Herod himself died under God's judgment shortly afterward. Scripture says that after Peter's escape, Herod had the prison guards killed and went to Caesarea (Acts 12:19). While there, he accepted



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the kind of worship that is appropriate only for God. “The people kept shouting, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’ Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died” (vv. 22–23). And thus the immediate threat against the church posed by Herod’s campaign of harassment and murder was ended.

But it is significant that James was the first of the apostles to be killed. (James is the only apostle whose death is actually recorded in Scripture.) Clearly, James was still a man of passion. His passion, now under the Holy Spirit’s control, had been so instrumental in the spread of the truth that it had aroused the wrath of Herod. Obviously, James was right where he had always hoped to be and where Christ had trained him to be—on the front line as the gospel advanced and the church grew.

That Son of Thunder had been mentored by Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and shaped by those means into a man whose zeal and ambition were useful instruments in the hands of God for spreading of the kingdom. Still courageous, zealous, and committed to the truth, he had apparently learned to use those qualities for the Lord’s service, rather than for his own self-aggrandizement. And now his strength was so great that when Herod decided it was time to stop the church, James was the first man who had to die. He thus drank the cup Christ gave him to drink. His life was short, but his influence continues to this day.

History records that James’s testimony bore fruit right up until the moment of his execution. Eusebius, the early church historian, passes on an account of James’s death that came from Clement of Alexandria: “[Clement] says that 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. They were both therefore, he says, led away together; and on the way 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.” Thus in the end, James had learned to be more like Andrew, bringing people to Christ instead of itching to execute judgment.

James is the prototype of the passionate, zealous, front runner who is dynamic, strong, and ambitious. Ultimately, his passions were tempered by sensitivity and grace. Somewhere along the line he had learned to control his anger, bridle his tongue, redirect his zeal, eliminate his thirst for revenge, and completely lose his selfish ambition. And the Lord used him to do a wonderful work in the early church.

Such lessons are sometimes hard for a man of James’s passions to learn. But if I have to choose between a man of burning, flaming, passionate, enthusiasm with a potential for failure on the one hand, and a cold compromiser on the other hand, I’ll take the man with passion every time. Such zeal must always be harnessed and tempered with love. But if it is surrendered to the control of the Holy Spirit and blended with patience and longsuffering, such zeal is a marvelous instrument in the hands of God. The life of James offers clear proof of that.⁵

James and John the Sons of Zebedee

James and his brother **John** were among the first of the twelve apostles. **Since they are always mentioned together until the death of James**, it is reasonable to tell the story of both together. They lived in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee and were fishermen. They were the sons of **Zebedee** and were in partnership with Simon **Peter**.

Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee when he called Simon Peter and **Andrew** to follow him (according to John, he called Andrew, who then brought Simon Peter to him). Jesus then saw James and John in the boat with Zebedee, and he called them. They immediately left their father in the boat and went with Jesus (Matt. 4:18).

In Luke’s account, Simon Peter, James, and John were fishing and had caught nothing. Jesus, who already knew Simon Peter, asked him to put him out in his boat so that he could preach to the people. He then told the three of them to go out and drop their nets, and they were miraculously filled with fish to the breaking point. At this they accepted him as the Messiah, left their boats, and followed him (Luke 5:1–11).

Whenever the two brothers are mentioned by name, **James is always named first, denoting that he was the older**. They are also often referred to simply as the sons of Zebedee. This indicates that Zebedee was well known in the community. As they owned their own boats (a huge investment) and had servants, they were, by the standards of those days, very prosperous. On a surface reading it seems callous of James

⁵ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *Twelve ordinary men: how the Master shaped his disciples for greatness, and what He wants to do with you* (pp. 77–94). Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group.



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and John simply to walk out on their father and follow Jesus. However, if Zebedee were as prosperous as all the evidence indicates, he was by no means left alone and helpless. He had servants and possibly other partners and would not have been put in a financial bind by the absence of his sons.

The decision of James and John to follow Jesus was not as spur-of-the-moment as it appears on the surface. According to Luke's Gospel, Jesus knew Simon Peter fairly well already and thus would have known James, John, and Zebedee, Peter's business partners. **Before calling Simon he had healed Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38ff.), and he had asked Simon to take him out in his boat to preach to the crowd.**

Also, there is evidence that Zebedee was Jesus' uncle, in which case Jesus had probably known them all since childhood. The evidence is somewhat round-about but nonetheless strong (although not all accept it). Matthew reports that "Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons" were present at the crucifixion (Matt. 27:56); Mark reports that "Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome" brought spices to embalm Jesus (Mark 16:1); and John says that "his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" were at the foot of the cross (John 19:25).

If this third woman, variously identified as "the mother of Zebedee's sons," "Salome," and "his mother's sister," are all the same person, then Zebedee was married to Mary's sister Salome and was therefore Jesus' uncle; and thus James and John were his cousins. If that is the case, since they lived only about fifteen miles apart, they would undoubtedly have known each other all their lives. Jesus would also have known their friends Simon Peter and Andrew, again probably since childhood. This could have been the reason why Jesus chose to make Capernaum his home when he was rejected in Nazareth.

It must be noted, however, that many scholars reject this relationship on the basis that if they were indeed cousins the Bible would have made that clear, because such relationships were considered very important in those times.

James and John, along with Peter, were among the "inner circle" of the apostles. They were the only ones of the twelve whom Jesus allowed to join him at the raising of Jairus's daughter, and they were the only three whom he brought with him onto the Mount of Transfiguration. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took Peter, James, and John aside with him while he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. In spite of this, the faith of all three of them was weak, not reaching its acme of strength until after the Resurrection.

James and John were obviously men of strong personality, and they were also capable of being rash, speaking without thinking. Jesus called them *Boanerges*, an Aramaic word that, roughly translated (via the Greek ἤιοι βροντῆς, *Huiōi Brontēs*), means "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). When the Samaritans were rude to Jesus, James and John asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" Jesus, of course, rebuked them (Luke 9:54).

They also displayed their misunderstanding of his teaching when they approached him to ask that they might sit on his right and left in his kingdom. This was not so much rash as indicative of completely missing the point of Jesus' message. (For further commentary on that incident, see *Twelve Apostles, The*, especially the discussion of patronage in that article.) Jesus told them that they would share the same cup from which he must drink (referring, of course, to his suffering) (Mark 10:39). **In fulfillment of this prophecy, James was executed at the order of Herod Agrippa I, shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. This is the only martyrdom of an apostle that is recorded in the Bible.**

According to tradition, before his death James was a missionary to Spain, and he is the patron saint of that nation. Tradition says that after his martyrdom his body was carried back to Spain, where it is buried at Santiago de Compostela (*Santiago* being Spanish for "Saint James").

John survived James by several years as a prominent leader of the church. The book of Acts tells of his accompanying Peter on several missions, during one of which they healed a cripple (Acts 3). They also incurred the wrath of the leaders of the Jews (Acts 4:3ff.). John was also a member of the Council of Jerusalem that settled the Judaizing controversy (Gal. 2:9).

Traditionally John is accepted as the author of the Fourth Gospel and the three letters of John. Because of the similarity of literary style it is reasonably certain that all four documents were written by the same author, but their sophisticated style raises the question of whether a poorly educated fisherman is likely to have progressed to that literary level without intensive study.

John is also identified by tradition with "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23). Many dispute this on the grounds that John would not have described himself in such exalted terms; on the other hand, if he is not the author of the Gospel, then that argument vanishes. It is considerably less likely that he is the



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same as John the Divine, the author of the book of Revelation. This book is almost definitely written by a different author from that of the other four.

There is an ancient and quite reasonable tradition that John, into whose care Jesus gave Mary (John 19:25ff.), moved with her to Ephesus, where they both eventually died and were buried. A considerably less strong tradition says that John was martyred soon after his brother James.⁶

Death of Herod Agrippa I

Herod Agrippa I (b. circa 11/10 BC) was the son of Aristobulus and Bernice. In AD 41 the emperor Claudius appointed Agrippa as king (βασιλεύς, *basileus*) over his grandfather's former territory (Josephus, *Antiquities* 19.274–77). He reigned over Judaea for three years (Josephus, *Antiquities* 19.343; AD 41–44). The narrator of Acts recounts several events connected with Herod Agrippa I, including:

- His persecution of the early church (Acts 12:1–19a)
- His relocation from Judaea to Caesarea (Acts 12:19b)
- His death (Acts 12:20–23; see Josephus, *Antiquities* 19.343–54a)

Acts mentions the death of James, the brother of John (compare Mark 1:19; 3:17; 5:37) briefly (Acts 12:2) as a side note to recounting Herod's apprehension of Peter and failed attempt to kill him (Acts 12:3–19a). Bruce assigned a date of circa **AD 43** to James' death (*Acts*, 92).⁷

12:1 Herod is Herod Agrippa I (A.D. 37-44), grandson of Herod the Great. Little is recorded about this man in Scripture, but it is known that he had helped Claudius become emperor of Rome after the notorious Emperor Caligula was murdered. Herod Agrippa I suffered an untimely and humiliating death (vv. 20-24). By including this account here Luke may be showing a connection between the death of Herod and his persecution of Christians.⁸

PALESTINE, ADMINISTRATION OF, ROMAN Covers the Roman government structure of the ancient land of Israel leading up to and during the first century AD.

Introduction

Palestine is the narrow strip of land generally lying between the Jordan River valley (including the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea) on the east and the Mediterranean Sea on the west. **It is roughly 150 miles (240 km) long from north to south and varies from about 30 miles (50 km) to 70 miles (115 km) wide from east to west.**

The designation "Palestine" is a Greek version of the ancient land of the Philistines (Παλαιστίνη, *Palaistinē*) (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 1:131; compare Gen 21:32; Exod 15:14; 1 Macc 3:24). Its use for this strip of land dates back at least to the fifth century BC in the writings of Herodotus (Hist. 1.105), who saw Palestine as a southern extension of Syria.

Palestine's geography made it a natural crossroads between the fertile valleys of Mesopotamia to the north and east, and the populous Nile River valley and delta of Egypt to the southwest. Palestine was often a contested area, with armies of many nations marching across it or engaging in battle within its borders. The local rulers of Palestine were controlled at various points in history by lopsided alliances with the great powers of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Grecian Syria, and Rome.

⁶ Losch, R. R. (2008). In *All the People in the Bible: An A-Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (pp. 185–186). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁷ Sweeney, J. P. (2016). *Chronology of the New Testament*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Kloppenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁸ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Ac 12:1). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



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Roman Rule

Palestine was under some form of Roman rule throughout the New Testament period. This changed in several ways during the first century, and noting these changes provides understanding for the historical dynamics of the period.

Roman Conquest

Toward the end of the period of the Roman Republic, Pompey, the celebrated general, began campaigning in the eastern half of the Mediterranean world, winning new territories for Rome. After a short siege, Pompey took Jerusalem in 63 BC, establishing Roman rule in Palestine. In the east, the Romans tended to allow the continuation of traditional government structures and used favored nationals as client rulers. At this time, Rome was morphing from a republic ruled by the Senate to an empire ruled by an emperor, and this change had an impact on the administrative structures of Palestine.

The House of Herod

One of the early client rulers in the Palestine area for the Romans was an Idumaeen, **Antipater** (d. 43 BC), who had served as a court official for the last Hasmonean rulers. The Romans saw Antipater as a useful ally, and he was appointed to rule over Judaea by Julius Caesar in 47 BC. Antipater was given the title “guardian” (ἐπίτροπος, *epitropos*) (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14:143), presumably with the authority to gather taxes. Antipater and his descendants were neither Romans nor true Jews, but retained some measure of authority in the Palestine region until the death of Herod Agrippa II at the end of the first century.

Antipater’s descendants were the Herods.

Antipater’s son, Herod the Great, had himself elected as “King of the Jews” by the Roman Senate during the chaotic period following Antipater’s death. His authority in the region became nearly absolute. This title was given in Rome in 40 BC because of the sponsorship of Mark Anthony (Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.284), but it took until 37 BC for Herod to gain mastery over Jerusalem (after a five-month siege; Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.351) and the region of Judaea, thus establishing himself as a petty king under the sponsorship and control of Rome.

Herod’s rule as a semi-autonomous prince and a friend of Rome lasted until his death in **4 BC, during which time he expanded his territory to include most of Palestine. At his death, his realm was apparently split into four parts (Judaea, Galilee, Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Abilene), three parts of which went to his sons. Herod Archelaus was made “ethnarch” of Judaea (Matt 2:22), while Herod Antipas and Herod Philip were made “tetrarchs” of Galilee and Ituraea/Trachonitis to the north (Luke 3:1). These were titles of relatively low prestige that the Romans allowed for their client kings.**

Archelaus was removed from office by the emperor Caesar Augustus in AD 6 after 10 years of bad decisions and violence (Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.342–44). This led to the appointment of the first Roman official, Coponius, as governor over Judaea (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18:2). The most famous and notorious of these Roman governors was Pontius Pilate, who ruled from AD 26–36, presided over the trials of Jesus of Nazareth, and ordered Jesus’ crucifixion.

The Herods ruled as both regional political figures and as representatives of Rome. In the Lucan version of Jesus’ trials, Pilate, the Roman, attempts to transfer his legal problems concerning Jesus to Herod Antipas, a local governor (Luke 23:6, 7). This is because Pilate learns that Jesus is a Galilean, making Jesus subject to Antipas’ jurisdiction. Luke comments that this event resulted in a friendship between Pilate and Antipas—previously hostile rivals (Luke 23:12). In the eyes of Rome, Judaea and Galilee would both have been small, troublesome provinces, but their governors were of roughly equal status even though Pilate was an appointed Roman official and Antipas was a local prince.

Roman Governors of Palestine

During the period of the empire, Roman provinces were administrated in two primary ways. Older, more stable provinces were controlled by the Roman Senate. At the time of Augustus, there were 10 senatorial provinces, each ruled by member of the senate who would be known as “proconsul” while governor (ἀνθύπατος, *anthypatos*; Acts 13:8; 18:12; compare Plutarch, *Caesar* 21, where Nepos is described as the



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proconsul of Spain). Most of these senatorial provinces were peaceful and did not have Roman legions stationed on their soil.

Newer and less stable provinces were under the control of the emperor, who was technically considered the governor of each. These “imperial” provinces had proxy governors appointed by the emperor. The larger imperial provinces would have a person of senatorial rank as the chief authority, often called an imperial legate. The term “legate” was tied to the legion(s) in the province that would be under this person’s direct control.

In the New Testament era, the province of Syria had an imperial legate who resided in Antioch. It is sometimes thought that Judaea was some type of “subprovince” for Syria, but this is not accurate. The legate in Antioch would have always been of higher Roman rank than the governor of Judaea was, so he personally outranked him. This hierarchy of relationships allowed the Romans rulers of Antioch to meddle in the affairs of Palestine.

Both Josephus and the New Testament writers refer to Pilate as a ἡγεμών (*hēgemōn*) (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.55; Matt 27:2), a general term for one who governs (compare Acts 23:24; 26:30). It was long thought that Pilate’s official title was “procurator,” but this has been questioned, with some believing he would have been called “prefect.” This was confirmed in 1961 when the so-called “Pilate Stone” was discovered by archaeologists excavating Caesarea Maritime. This stone is incomplete, but seems to make reference to “PONTIUS PILATUS PRAEFECTUS IUDAEAE” (Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judaea).

The Jewish governors of this period used Caesarea Maritime, the seacoast city built by Herod the Great, as their primary residence. They preferred the mild Mediterranean climate of Caesarea to the hot and dusty Jerusalem, and the cultural climate of Roman and Hellenistic influence to the hyperpartisan religious atmosphere of the temple city. The governors would travel to Jerusalem at important times such as Passover, to be present in case the large numbers of Jewish pilgrims presented any challenge to Roman authority.

The central motivation for the Romans to expand their empire to remote provinces like Judaea was to bring wealth back to Rome. Whereas Alexander the Great was driven by a personal thirst to conquer and by a desire to spread the Hellenistic culture, the Romans were content to let the local peoples retain their culture and even their local governing structures as long as peace prevailed. The Roman governor of a province well understood the importance of producing tax revenues. In the imperial provinces, this included the high cost of maintaining Roman troops in residence, as well as contributions to the imperial coffers. This taxation system also allowed the governors to amass great personal wealth in a short time, making service outside the city of Rome enticing to Romans like Pilate, whose opportunities for advancement would have been limited at home.

Herod Agrippa I

Herod Agrippa I (AD 10–44) was the grandson of Herod the Great, but had been raised in the city of Rome and was on intimate terms with Emperors Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. He was, then, more Roman than Palestinian. His favored status eventually allowed him to be given control over most of Palestine by AD 41 (Josephus, Antiquities 19.274–77), his territories exceeding that of his grandfather. He was also allowed to use the title “king” (βασιλεύς, basileus; Acts 12:1). Agrippa’s death in AD 44 ended this meteoric rise to power, and his realm was divided again into smaller administrative units by Romans ruled by Roman governors.

Local Government in Judaea and Galilee

During the lives of Jesus and Paul, Jerusalem was the home of a Jewish supreme council often known as the Sanhedrin (συνέδριον, *synedrion*; Matt 26:59). The Sanhedrin was composed of both laymen (the Pharisees) and religious professionals (the scribes and Sadducees) (see Luke 22:66; John 11:47). This high council had great authority, especially in religious matters, but its reach was limited by the Roman overlords. This is illustrated specifically by the Sanhedrin’s reluctance to carry out a death sentence against Jesus on its own authority (John 18:31). The authority of the Sanhedrin seems to have been parallel to that of the Roman administrators and worked through synagogues outside Jerusalem, even outside Judaea (Acts 9:1, 2).



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Jewish villages in Palestine had their own councils, also called the Sanhedrin (συνέδρα, *synedra*; Mark 13:9). These councils served as courts and provided other administrative functions for the local citizens. Their job was doubtlessly complicated by the presence of Roman officials (e.g., the centurion of Capernaum; Matt 8:5) and Jews who served the Romans as tax collectors (e.g. Matthew/Levi in Luke 5:27 and Zacchaeus in Luke 19:2) in these villages.

Selected Resources for Further Study

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Bauckham, Richard, ed. *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.
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Smallwood, E. Mary. *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations*. 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill, 1981.

MARK S. KRAUSE⁹

Herod Agrippa I (A.D. 37–44)

“So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’ Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.” (Acts 12:21–23 NKJV)

Herod Agrippa I was the son of Aristobulus, who was the son of Herod the Great and Mariamne I. Though rather incompetent and inept, especially in handling finances, Agrippa happened to be in the right place at the right time. Thus, because he had sufficiently flattered Caligula before he became emperor, Caligula gave him the territory of Philip and bestowed on him the title of king. When Caligula was murdered in 41, Agrippa helped Claudius ascend the throne. Claudius not only confirmed him in his rule but added Judea and Samaria to his domain. Thus he gained control of all the land Herod the Great had ruled.

To gain favor with the Jews Agrippa persecuted the early Christians (Acts 12:1–19), killing James the son of Zebedee and jailing Peter. After Peter’s release by divine intervention, Agrippa ordered the death of the guards.

Ultimately Agrippa’s sins caught up with him. As Acts 12:20–23 states, he was struck down with a fatal and loathsome disease while he was playing god at Caesarea. Josephus (*Antiquities* XIX.8.2) gives a roughly similar account.¹⁰

Birth Order

The impact on a child’s personality of the order of birth has intrigued psychologists since the early twentieth century, and over two thousand studies have been published on the subject.

In a front page story of the *Wall Street Journal*, David Stipp wrote about the newest research regarding birth order:

“Historian Frank Sulloway says it is only natural that he has spent twenty-four years plotting to overthrow the reigning ideas in his field. After all, he’s a later-born.

“Based on a massive statistical analysis of many of those who shaped the past, Dr. Sulloway has detected a grand pattern. Forget Adam Smith’s invisible hand, Karl Marx’s class struggles and Sigmund Freud’s Oedipal clashes. Radical change in human affairs is wrought by the perennial rivalry between the eldest children and their younger siblings.

“Later-borns are more open-minded than firstborns,” says Dr. Sulloway. “They are ‘born to rebel,’ take risks and explode accepted wisdom. Charles Darwin, Igor Stravinsky and Rachel Carson were later-borns. So was Victorian novelist George Eliot, who renounced religion and lived adulterously with her

⁹ Krause, M. S. (2016). [Palestine, Administration of, Roman](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹⁰ Vos, H. F. (1999). *Nelson’s new illustrated Bible manners & customs: how the people of the Bible really lived* (p. 403). Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers.



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married mentor.” Some others: Marx, Lenin, Castro, Ho Chi Minh, Ralph Nader, Marlon Brando, Anita Hill, and Bill Gates.

“Firstborns tend to stiffly support the status quo,” says Dr. Sulloway, a guest scholar at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “They are status-conscious and often emerge as leaders. But when faced with revolutionary change, they try to slam on the brakes. John Adams, Calvin Coolidge, and Ayn Rand were firstborns. So are Chief Justice William Rehnquist and radio host Rush Limbaugh.”¹¹

<http://birthorderguy.com/parenting/how-birth-order-affects-personality/>

First Born

Newscasters and TV talk show hosts tend to be first born or only children. Prominent examples include: Walter Cronkite, Peter Jennings, Dan Rather, Ted Koppel, Oprah, Donahue, Geraldo, Arsenio Hall and Rush Limbaugh. Over half of U.S presidents were firstborns. Clearly, firstborns are natural leaders. They also tend to be reliable, conscientious and perfectionists who don't like surprises. Although, firstborns are typically aggressive, many are also compliant people pleasers. They are model children who have a strong need for approval from anyone in charge.

Only Children

Only children are firstborns in triplicate. They are even more responsible and even bigger perfectionists. They usually get along better with people older than themselves.

Middle Child

These kids are the most difficult to pin down. They are guaranteed to be opposite of their older sibling, but that difference can manifest in a variety of ways. Middle children often feel like their older brother gets all the glory while their younger sister escapes all discipline. Because the middle child feels that the world pays him less attention, he tends to be secretive; he does not openly share his thoughts or feelings.

Middle children may not feel they have a special place in the family so friends and peer groups become much more important. They can usually read people well, they are peacemakers who see all sides of a situation, they are independent and inventive. If a firstborn is a company's CEO, the middle child is the entrepreneur.

Last Born

Babies of the family are social and outgoing, they are the most financially irresponsible of all birth orders. They just want to have a good time. Knowing that these kids love the limelight, it's no surprise to discover that Billy Crystal, Goldie Hawn, Drew Carey, Jim Carey and Steve Martin are all lastborns.

While lastborns may be charming, they also have the potential to be manipulative, spoiled or babied to the point of helplessness.

The last born is the one who will probably still have a pet name although he's 29 and has a masters degree.

Exceptions?

Some variables can affect the above descriptions. For instance, if there are several years between the first and second child, the second child will have some characteristics of a firstborn. Or, if the firstborn is a girl and the second a boy, the son will have some first-born characteristics because he is the family's first male offspring. Sibling deaths, adoptions and blended families can also upset the traditional birth order.

Children are all different and have to be parented in different ways. You need to parent kids differently depending on their birth order.

Parenting The First Born

- **Don't Be an Improver:** Your child already feels the need to be perfect in every way. “Improving” tasks your firstborn attempts on her own will only increase the pressure she places on herself. For instance, let's say you ask your oldest son to make his bed. Being a firstborn he will, of course, seek your approval and want you to see the finished task. If you tell him it looks good but then proceed to fluff the pillow and straighten out wrinkles in the bedspread, you send the message that he could have done better.
- **Take Two-On-One Time:** “Firstborns respond better to adult company than children of any other birth order. Firstborns often feel that parents don't pay much attention to them because

¹¹ Morgan, R. J. (2000). *Nelson's complete book of stories, illustrations, and quotes* (electronic ed., p. 596). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.



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they're always concentrating on the younger ones in the family. Make a special effort to have the first born join you and your spouse in going out alone for a treat, or to run some kind of special errand.

- **Don't Pile On Responsibilities:** Older children often feel as though they do much more work around the house than their younger siblings. Share the duties and errands as soon as young children are capable. And, stay away from making your first born the family's instant baby sitter. Check with his schedule, just as you would an outside babysitter.

Parenting The Middle Child

- **Make Time To Listen:** Remember that middle children tend to avoid sharing how they really feel. Although it's important to set aside time to talk to all of your children, it's particularly important to make this happen with the middle child because he is least likely to insist on his fair share of time.
- **Allow Child to Make Decisions:** Empower your middle child and make him feel special by allowing him to make choices such as who gets to bowl first or what the family will eat for dessert. This will help alleviate feelings of always being overshadowed by older and younger siblings.
- **Update the Family Album:** This may sound silly but it truly is important. There tend to be a billion photos of the firstborn and about six of the next child. To a child flipping through the family album, this is a sure sign that he's not loved as much. Be sure to have photos of the middle child alone, not always paired with the older sibling.

Parenting The Last Born

- **Stick to the Rules:** The saying "he gets away with murder" is based in reality. Statistics show the lastborn is least likely to be disciplined and the least likely to have to toe the mark the way the older children did. You can be sure your older children are watching you closely!
- **Hand Out Responsibility:** Lastborns often wind up with less to do around the house for two reasons. One, they are pros at ducking out of work. And two, they are so little and "helpless" that the rest of the family decides it's easier to do the work themselves. You want to raise a confident, self-reliant child so don't promote this helpless image.
- **Applaud Accomplishments:** Lastborns are well known for feeling that nothing they do is important. Make a big deal out of accomplishments (you may have seen two other kids learn to ride a bike but it's the first time for your baby) and be sure he gets his fair share of "marquee time" on the refrigerator.

Parents' Birth Order

We've been discussing children's birth orders, but it's important to realize that parenting style is also influenced by the parent's own birth order. Parents subconsciously identify with the child who holds the spot in the family they occupied themselves. A lastborn dad might think his youngest antics are cute while mom sees them as irresponsible.

Also, firstborns are perfectionists their whole lives. As parents, they may set standards that are difficult for a child to reach. This makes them frustrated and their children unhappy.

What Was the Meaning and Importance of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)?

In the earliest days of the Christian church, the church was comprised predominately of Jews. In Acts chapter 8 the gospel spread to the Samaritans (who were ethnically mixed Jews-Gentiles), and many Samaritans received Jesus Christ as Savior. In Acts chapter 10, the Apostle Peter was the first to take the gospel specifically to the Gentiles, and many received Christ as Savior. In Acts chapter 13-14, Paul and Barnabas had a very fruitful ministry among the Gentiles. All of these Gentiles turning to faith in Christ caused concern among the Jewish believers, first expressed in Acts 11:1-18, and the issues that caused concern were ultimately decided upon at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The issues centered on two questions: **Do Gentiles first have to become Jews before they can become Christians? Do Gentiles have to observe the Mosaic Law after they become Christians?** [Today = how Jewish should believers be]



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The impetus for the Jerusalem council is given in Acts 15, verses 1 and 5, “But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’ ... It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the Law of Moses.” Some Jewish Christians were teaching that Gentiles had to observe the Mosaic Law and Jewish customs in order to be saved. Since this teaching clearly contradicted the fact that salvation was by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Acts 15:11), the apostles and church leaders held the first Christian council to settle the issue. In verses 7–11, the apostle Peter spoke of his ministry with the Gentiles, as recorded in Acts chapter 10. Peter focused on the fact that the Holy Spirit was given to uncircumcised Gentiles in precisely the same manner the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles and Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost. This led Peter to the conclusion that there should be no **“placing a yoke on the neck of the (Gentile) disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10).**

Jesus’ half-brother James, who had become a leader of the church in Jerusalem, agreed with Peter and declared, “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19). The Jerusalem Council then proceeded to give four “rules” that Gentile Christians should live by. **These were not rules the Gentiles must follow in order to be saved. Rather, the rules were to build harmony between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the first century.** The four rules the Jerusalem Council decided upon were that Gentile Christians should abstain from: food polluted by idols, sexual immorality, the meat of strangled animals, and blood. The instructions were not intended to guarantee salvation but *to promote peace within the early church.*

It is interesting that the issue the Jerusalem Council was dealing with is still very much an issue in the church today. There are groups still teaching that Christians must obey the Old Testament Law. Whether it is the Sabbath day or the food laws or all of the Old Testament Law outside of the sacrificial system—there are groups which declare observance of the Law is either required for salvation, or at least a crucially important aspect of the Christian life. Sadly, these groups either completely ignore or grossly misinterpret the decision of the Jerusalem Council. The specific goal of the Jerusalem Council was to decide what aspects, if any, of the Old Testament Law, Christians must observe. The Jerusalem Council, for the sake of melding the Jewish and Gentile cultures within the Antioch church, said that the Gentiles should eschew their former pagan practices associated with idolatry. There was no mention of the Sabbath whatsoever. Further, the Jerusalem Council made it abundantly clear that these rules were not requirements for salvation by reaffirming that salvation is by grace for both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15:11). How many arguments would be solved if the church today would simply follow the principle set by the Jerusalem Council—limit your liberty for the sake of love?¹²

APOSTOLIC COUNCIL Meeting in Jerusalem at which the apostles and elders of Jerusalem defended the right of Paul and Barnabas to preach the gospel to the Gentiles without forcing converts to obey the Jewish laws (Acts 15). A “decree” from the council did ask Gentile converts not to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols, not to eat meat with blood in it, not to eat animals which had been strangled, and not to commit sexual immorality (Acts 15:28–29). These requirements may all be taken from Leviticus 17–18, which set up requirements not only on the “house of Israel” but also on “the strangers which sojourn among you” (Lev. 17:8).

In Galatians 2 Paul described the work of the council from his perspective, though some Bible students have long tried to distinguish between the events of Acts 15 and Galatians 2. Paul not only reported the council’s decision, he emphasized the fact that the council didn’t require Titus, a Gentile, to be circumcised.¹³

Acts 2:1

OFF TO A GOOD START

2:1 The Spirit’s timing for the launch of the church could not have been better. The drama that unfolds in Acts 2–3 coincides perfectly with the meaning and significance of the Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost)

¹² Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). *Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

¹³ Brand, C., Draper, C., England, A., Bond, S., Clendenen, E. R., & Butler, T. C. (Eds.). (2003). *Apostolic Council*. In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 88). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.



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then underway in Jerusalem. The diverse crowds that packed the city to celebrate the festival became a ready audience for the events that took place.

There were three great annual feasts in Jewish life (see “We Interrupt This Program ... ” at Luke 2:42): the Feast of Unleavened Bread (or Passover), the Feast of Weeks (or Harvest, or Pentecost), and the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths; see “We Interrupt This Program ... ” at John 7:37). On all three occasions, thousands of Jews made pilgrimages to the temple at Jerusalem.

The Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, took its name from the fact that it occurred seven weeks, or 50 days, after Passover. Each family offered thanks to God for the just-completed grain harvest by giving the firstfruits of its produce to the temple priests. Pentecost was a day of celebration; no work was carried out. Everyone was expected to participate—husbands and wives, parents and children, servants, priests, widows, orphans, even visitors and foreigners. The days of slavery in Egypt were recalled, and the people were reminded to observe God’s Law.

On this day, then, God’s Spirit chose to descend on the 120 believers gathered in the Upper Room. The event followed by 50 days the death of Jesus on the Cross and turned into a spiritual harvest: 3,000 people responded to Peter’s proclamation of the gospel (Acts 2:41), becoming the firstfruits of the church.

Acts 2:5

2:5

What happened at Pentecost began to reverse what happened at ancient Babel (Gen. 11:1–9). At Babel God confused the languages of the peoples and dispersed the nations abroad in order to stop their evil from multiplying. At Pentecost He brought Jews from many nations together in Jerusalem. Once again there was confusion (Acts 2:6), but this time it came from the fact that everyone heard ordinary men and women, filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking in the various languages of the ancient world. Then an international, multilingual church was born when the onlookers heard the gospel preached and believed it.

Acts 2:8

2:8–11 A SURPRISING FIRST FULFILLMENT OF ACTS 1:8

The harvest feast of Pentecost brought together thousands of Jews (including converts to Judaism) from all over the Roman Empire. This made it possible to bring about at least a partial fulfillment of the promise of Acts 1:8—that the gospel would spread “to the end of the earth”—much sooner than the apostles expected.

The 3,000 who converted following Peter’s Pentecost speech (2:14–41) stayed for a while in Jerusalem but eventually returned to their homelands, taking their newfound faith with them.

Parthia: Included parts of modern-day Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. Part of the Persian Empire conquered by the Greeks in 330 A.D., it broke away in 250 A.D. and built an empire of its own. Even the Romans could not conquer it, and it became the other first-century superpower.

Media: A mountainous region southwest of Parthia. It aligned either with Assyria or Babylon to suit its interests. Like the Parthians, Medes were Indo-European peoples whose religion was the dualistic Zoroastrianism.

Elam: Home to an ancient people who struggled with the Babylonians, Assyrians, and Persians for control of Mesopotamia. After defeating the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 A.D., the Assyrians deported some Elamites to Samaria, and some Samaritan Jews to Elam.

Mesopotamia: The land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in modern-day Iraq, homeland of the Jewish patriarch Abram (Abraham) and later of the feared Babylonians.

NATIONS OF PENTECOST

Judea: The Graeco-Roman name for the homeland of the Jews.



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Cappadocia: A large Roman province in eastern Asia Minor, now Turkey.

Pontus: A Roman province in northern Asia Minor on the Black Sea coast. A mountainous region, it produced olives, grain, and timber.

Asia: A strategic Roman province that included the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos, which vied for domination of the region. Its wealth and culture were legendary, and positions in its government were among the most prized in all the Roman Empire.

Phrygia: A large, mountainous, inland region divided by the Romans between Galatia in the east and Asia in the west.

Pamphylia: The southern coast of Asia Minor. Its name means "a region of every tribe."

Egypt: Homeland of the ancient north African empire. By the time of Christ an estimated one million Jews lived in Alexandria (Hebrews dispersed from Palestine after the fall of Israel to the Assyrians in 722 A.D. and of Judah to the Babylonians in 597–581 A.D.).

Libya and Cyrene: The same region as modern-day Libya on the northern coast of Africa. Founded by the Greeks, Cyrene was established by the Romans as the provincial capital of Libya. In New Testament times it was an intellectual center with a large Jewish population.

Rome: Capital of the empire, and therefore the symbolic center of Luke's world. ♦

Acts 2:37

CARROTS, NOT STICKS

2:37–38 As believers, we are called to proclaim the message of Christ to unbelievers in the best way we know how, being faithful to the truth. That's really all that Peter did at Pentecost (Acts 2:14–36), but his speech produced dramatic results: the small band of Christ's followers added 3,000 believers that day (2:41).

In the same way, each of us needs to speak up as best we can when the opportunity presents itself. What we say will reflect our understanding of the faith at the time. We may not sound as impressive as Peter, or a minister, or some other believer. But at least our message will be authentic.

Notice that Peter did not call for an immediate response. Only after God's Spirit had "cut to the heart" those in the audience and they asked for help (2:37) did he explain what they ought to do (2:38).

In the same way we need to offer the "carrot" of truth to others—the facts of the gospel and our experience of it—and let the Holy Spirit wield the "stick" of conviction. We should strive for impact and understanding before pressing for a decision. That might take weeks or years, or just moments. But we need the sensitive timing of a midwife as we assist in the spiritual birthing process.

Acts 2:42

2:42–47

The converts from Peter's sermon remained in Jerusalem for a while, perhaps as guests of the handful of local believers. They celebrated their new life in Christ in five important ways (Acts 2:42–47):

- (1) they listened to the apostles' teaching;
- (2) they practiced community by sharing meals;
- (3) they worshiped God with praise;
- (4) they demonstrated lifestyle changes by sharing their possessions with each other; and
- (5) they cared for each others' needs.

These essential behaviors of the first believers form a challenging summary of behaviors that should characterize believers today.



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For help in examining your lifestyle and character in light of Scripture, see “Ten Commandments for Practical Living” at Ps. 15:2. Also see “Ten Commandments—Ten Great Freedoms” at Gal 5:18, and “Ten Commandments for Practical Living” at James 2:8–13.

Acts 2:46

2:46–47 RECONNECTING SUNDAY AND MONDAY

Does the faith you celebrate on Sunday sometimes feel disconnected from the “real world” you face on Monday? The newly formed group of believers (Acts 2:46–47) closed that gap by practicing a rhythm of two kinds of experiences—gathering for growth and worship balanced by scattering into the world for work and to communicate the gospel to non-Christian friends and coworkers.

Notice this rhythm of gathering for refinement and scattering for engagement as we see it progressing in Acts 4–9:

This pattern continues throughout Acts as the narrative moves back and forth between internal meetings of the church and external encounters with the surrounding culture. The account includes more than twenty refinement narratives and more than fifty engagement narratives. We clearly see a connection between the development of faith and its delivery.

Believers today could help to reconnect Sundays and Mondays by moving through this same cycle. The gathering process might include worship services, praise gatherings, prayer meetings, fellowship over meals, and teaching for growth. Such encounters prepare us for Monday’s world of work and responsibility, filled as it often is with pressures, conflicts, and opportunities to engage unbelievers as they inspect or perhaps even oppose our faith.

Rather than being disconnected, these two worlds need to be vitally connected. The refinement of our faith as we gather for growth supplies much-needed strength as we engage the world Monday through Saturday. On the other hand, the realities of life outside the fellowship can alert us to areas where we need to grow in faith.

Are you reconnecting Sunday and Monday by practicing this rhythm? Is there a link between the resources of your faith community and the demands of your world? Are there ways to improve the connections? ♦

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¹⁴ [Word in life study Bible](#). (1996). (electronic ed., Ac 2:1–46). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.