

CONTENTS

Foreword	9
Introduction: Irreconcilable Differences?	11
PART 1: The Lives of James and Paul	
Chapter 1: James, Brother of Jesus	19
Chapter 2: Paul, Persecutor of the Church	25
Chapter 3: James the Just, Servant of Jesus Christ	33
Chapter 4: Paul, Apostle of Jesus	41
Chapter 5: The Shared Ministry of James and Paul	51
PART 2: The Letters of James and Paul	
Chapter 6: Abraham's Foundational Faith (Gen. 15:6)	65
Chapter 7: James, Justification, and Fake Faith (James 2:14–26)	77
Chapter 8: Paul, Justification, and Godly Good Works (Gal. 3 and Rom. 4)	87
PART 3: The Legacy of James and Paul	
Chapter 9: Faith, Works, and Justification	103
Chapter 10: Preaching and Teaching James and Paul through the Centuries	117
Chapter 11: Faith and Works in Real Life	129
Epilogue: Unity, Diversity, and Faithfulness	143
Acknowledgments	149
Notes	151

JAMES, BROTHER OF JESUS

We know a lot more about Paul's early life than we do about James's. Paul wrote thirteen letters in the New Testament, and most of them have biographical tidbits peppered throughout. Paul also dominates the second half of the book of Acts, so we have a lot of information from him and about him in the New Testament.

The material on James, on the other hand, is a little spotty. Yes, he is a prominent figure in Acts, but Peter and Paul tend to dominate the narrative in that book. We have one letter from him, but it includes almost nothing in the way of biographical detail. In fact, we get more details about James from Paul's letters than we do from James himself! In Galatians 1, Paul calls James "the Lord's brother" (v. 19), along with some other details that we'll come back to later.¹ The Gospels also include James in the list of Jesus' brothers. When the people in Nazareth were shocked by Jesus' teaching, they ask, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:3; see also Matt. 13:55).

The first thing to know about James's upbringing and early life is that he is called the "the Lord's brother." If we have Protestant ears, what this means is pretty straightforward. James was the son of Mary and Joseph, so he was Jesus' brother. Roman Catholics

believe that James and other men and women that the Gospels call Jesus' brothers and sisters were actually His close relatives, not His biological siblings. Part of this question is related to a debate about whether Mary remained a perpetual virgin, and this chapter is about James, not Mary, so we can't linger on this question.

If we are going to be fair, we also have to admit that even many well-known Protestant Reformers like Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and Thomas Cranmer also believed in Mary's lifelong virginity. However, this question was debated by the earliest Christians, and Matthew 1:25 says that Joseph and Mary did not have sexual intercourse "until" she gave birth to Jesus. This implies that they had a normal marriage that included sex and procreation after Jesus was born. I know my Roman Catholic friends have certain reasons for what they believe about Mary, but this belief could make Jesus' humanity and birth almost docetic (Docetism is the heresy that Jesus only seemed to be human, but really was not). If Jesus' birth did not have the normal effects on Mary's body, then it only seemed to be a normal human birth. And that might lead us to an unbiblical view of Jesus and the gospel. The truth is, whether James was Jesus' brother, cousin, uncle, or some other relative does not change most of the conclusions we'll reach here. Regardless of how exactly they were related, the consistent witness of the New Testament is that James was part of Jesus' family, so it is clear that James grew up in the village of Nazareth in Galilee.

Galilee of the Gentiles

Even though we don't have the same amount of evidence about Galilee as we do about Jerusalem around the same time, that doesn't mean we don't know anything about it. To get a handle on what Nazareth was like in the first century, we need to step

back a few centuries to Israel's exile in Babylon and Assyria. After centuries of rebellion against God's rule over them, He sent Israel in the north and, later, Judah in the south into exile. Their enemies in Assyria (Israel) and Babylon (Judah) invaded them and carried away their leading citizens. The promised land was under the authority of foreign rulers.

Without their leaders in power and without the temple in operation during the exile, many of the Jews who were still in the land intermarried with the surrounding nations. The descendants of these intermarriages were the Samaritans, whom we hear about in the Gospels. By the time James was growing up, the Romans had divided the land into several provinces: Judea in the south, Galilee in the north, and Samaria between them (the structure and borders shifted as different foreign rulers came and went, but we'll focus on just those three).

With the region of the Samaritans lying between them and Jerusalem and the rebuilt temple, Galilee was often seen as something of a backwater region. On top of that, Nazareth, a small village in Galilee, was kind of a backwater in a backwater.

Even though it was far from Jerusalem, many fervent Jews who lived in Galilee were devoted to worshiping in the temple and keeping the Law. We know that Jesus' family was devout. Mary's relatives, Elizabeth and Zechariah, the parents of John the Baptist, served in the temple in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph also had a fervent faith in God, and they were devoted to keeping the Law. At least once a year, they would travel to Jerusalem for the Passover. This is why they were in Jerusalem when Jesus stayed behind in the temple (Luke 2:41–52). He was not trained as a rabbi or Pharisee the way that Paul later was, but we can say with confidence that James grew up learning the Scriptures and being devoted to following the God of Israel.

Also, James likely learned the same carpentry trade that

Joseph and Jesus did (Mark 6:3), and this trade probably included several different types of construction work. If so, then he would have interacted with Gentiles regularly in the larger nearby town of Sepphoris, which was about three miles from Nazareth. Sepphoris probably had a largely Jewish population, but throughout the first century, it also had a growing Roman influence and was becoming more and more Hellenized (influenced by Greek language and culture). Even though it isn't mentioned in the Gospels (a detail that may be telling in itself), it would have been impossible to avoid an occasional visit to this larger town and to interact with the Gentiles there.

To sum up, James and Jesus grew up in a family and home that was seriously devoted to the Law while living in a region that had a number of Greco-Roman influences, so they likely learned Greek in their early years. They also grew up far from the leaders of the Jews and the governing authorities in Jerusalem. Not many Jews in the first century would've expected the Messiah, the king who would reestablish the throne of David, to grow up there. As Nathanael asked Philip when he heard about Jesus, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Just about everyone living in Judea in the first century would have answered no. When James was growing up, being a leader in Jerusalem was probably the furthest thing from his mind. Yet this does not mean that he would have been anything less than a fervent and loyal Jew, striving to keep the Law and eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come. And during the earthly ministry of Jesus, James saw his brother as anything but the Messiah he expected.

Not Even His Brothers Believed in Him

I imagine it was difficult growing up with Jesus as your brother. Imagine if you had a sibling who never sinned. And He was born

after an angel visited your mother and father to tell them about His miraculous birth. The Gospels don't tell us anything about the dynamics of growing up with Jesus as one's brother, but it had to be difficult at times.

John 7:5 tells us that His brothers did not believe in Him during His ministry before the resurrection, but the first time we hear about His brothers is in the episode recorded in Matthew 12:46–50 (with parallels in Mark 3:31–35 and Luke 8:19–21). As the crowds around Him increased, His mother and brothers had trouble accessing him. Jesus' answer probably didn't win Him many style points in their eyes: "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (v. 50). James may have just rolled his eyes or he may have been angry at what he saw as a slight to Mary. Some scholars have suggested that they were following John the Baptist. Given the family in which they grew up, I think this is possible, maybe even likely. In any case, James did not believe in Jesus during His earthly life. This does not mean, however, that James and his brothers were not interested in keeping the Law or following the God of Israel. In fact, one historical tradition says that James was a Nazarite who took special vows to devote himself to prayer and purity.²

We hear about Jesus' brothers again in the next chapter in Matthew (Matt. 13:53–58; see also Mark 6:1–6). When Jesus returned to Nazareth to preach in the synagogue after teaching in many nearby villages, His close family and friends were astonished. They knew Him growing up and surely saw that He was a unique boy, but they did not expect anything like the wisdom He showed in His teaching or the power He displayed in His miracles (v. 54). They knew His mother Mary and His brothers—James, Joses, Simon, and Judas. Since their father, Joseph, was not mentioned, it is most likely that he had died sometime before then. They took offense at Jesus and did not believe in Him (vv. 57–58).

In John 2, we get a fleeting glimpse at Jesus' brothers and Mary when He stayed with them in Capernaum (John 2:12). Then John 7 is the only place we hear Jesus' brothers speak, when they asked Him to go to Judea for the Feast of Booths. They told Him that He should not keep His works a secret but instead, "show yourself to the world" (v. 4).

Their motive, however, was not to increase His ministry. In fact, they asked Him this because they did not yet believe in Him (v. 5). They wanted more evidence before they would believe in Him. Or maybe they wanted Jesus to be exposed as a fraud so that He would return home and stop shaming the family. Either way, they were not asking Him to come to Judea out of good motives, and they were not with Him through His trial and execution (notice their apparent absence in John 19:25–27). Even if they were followers of John the Baptist before Jesus was crucified, Jesus' brothers did not believe He was the Messiah or that He was doing God's will. Like another young Jewish man who grew up in Tarsus, they wanted to follow the God of Israel but did not at first believe that Jesus was really the Messiah. Then, after Jesus' execution, everything changed.

PAUL, PERSECUTOR OF THE CHURCH

About twenty years before Jesus' crucifixion, a few hundred miles northwest of Galilee in modern-day Turkey, a Jewish boy named Saul was born in Tarsus. This boy would grow up to be the man we know now as St. Paul. But, by his own testimony, he didn't exactly begin life as a saint. In this chapter, we want to put together as much as we can about Saul's early life until his calling and conversion on the road to Damascus.

Paul or Saul?

Before we start walking through what we can know of Paul's upbringing, let's straighten out the confusion about his name. Contrary to what many of us learned in Sunday school, nowhere in the Bible are we told that Saul changed his name to Paul after he started following Jesus. In fact, he is called "Saul" several times in Acts 13, which takes place years after he was converted (13:1, 7, 9). If he left behind that name when he was converted, someone didn't get the memo. Some scholars think that he took the name "Paul" in honor of Sergius Paulus, a Roman official on

Cyprus who began to follow Jesus after hearing Paul's preaching (Acts 13:12). This is possible, but I think there is a simpler explanation for the different names.

Every Roman citizen was given three names. Think of them like your first, middle, and last name. If his father was a Roman citizen who was also a devout Jew, it would make sense that Paul would have a Greco-Roman name (*Paulos*) and a Jewish name (*Saulos*). It is likely that "Paul" and "Saul" were two of his three names (we don't know exactly what order they came in or what the third name was). It would make most sense to go by "Saul" when he ministered in a primarily Jewish audience, and when he was on his Gentile mission, "Paul" would fit well.¹ With that out of the way, I'm going to call him "Paul" from here on.

Now back to Tarsus.

Tarsus

In Acts 22:28, Paul says he that was born a Roman citizen, so his father was a citizen as well. We don't know how they got this status, but it was somewhat rare for Jews to be Roman citizens—especially Jews who remained faithful to the Law of Moses. One historical tradition that goes back to Jerome in the fourth century AD speculates that the Romans brought Paul's family to Tarsus from Judea as prisoners of war (maybe when Pompey captured Jerusalem in 63 BC). Later, when Tarsus became the capital of that region, its citizens, including Paul's family, may have been granted citizenship as well.

By the first century, Tarsus was the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia, and later in his life, Paul would call it "no obscure city" (Acts 21:39). It was a "free city," which meant that its citizens weren't taxed by the Roman Empire. This was a little bit like Florida and Texas and other states that don't have state income

tax, except in this case there was not “federal” or imperial, tax.

If we look at a map of modern Turkey, Tarsus is in the south-eastern corner of Asia Minor, near the Turkey–Syria border. In the first century, the city was near a major trade route that went from Egypt, Judea, and Syria through Asia Minor, eventually leading to Rome. A lot of trading occurred in and around Tarsus, and it was possible to do well for yourself there with a little hard work and a few opportunities.

Apparently, Paul’s family was doing okay, because they were prosperous enough to send him to Jerusalem to receive a high-quality education at the feet of Gamaliel, probably the best-known rabbi in the city during that time. His family may have also sent his siblings there, because we know from Acts 22 and 23 that later in his life, Paul’s sister and nephew were living in Jerusalem.

Just like James’s, Paul’s parents were devout Jews, and they sent their son to Jerusalem to be educated in the Law. But Paul received much more extensive training in the Law and the traditions of the Pharisees than James did. This young man would grow to be a zealous defender of the Law and the developing traditions of the rabbis. But, also like James’s, his path was radically redirected in a way he never could have expected.

Education and Upbringing

As a Roman citizen, Paul would have also had access to a Greco-Roman education in Tarsus. We know from places like Acts 17, when Paul debated with the philosophers at the Areopagus in Athens, that he was familiar with Greco-Roman philosophy, and some scholars argue that his letters demonstrate that he knew the basics of Greco-Roman rhetoric. Like Athens, Tarsus was known for its love for philosophy, so Paul would have had access to the Greco-Roman schools in the city.

Somewhere along the way, he also learned a trade. Paul has typically been called a “tentmaker,” so much so that we often use this label for anyone who works another job while also working in ministry. However, the word “tentmaker” can be a little bit misleading. Paul was not making North Face–type tents. Instead, the word means something like a leather worker. Leather was usually used to make tents, but he may have made other things as well. Later in life, he used his ability to make a living to help support himself as he traveled throughout the Roman Empire.

In spite of his education in the Greco-Roman world and the trade that he learned from his father, Paul’s primary identity was as a follower of the God of Israel, and his primary education was in Jerusalem under Rabbi Gamaliel. As he wrote later in his life, Paul was “a Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5–6). He proudly traced his heritage to the tribe of Benjamin, which had produced another well-known Saul about one thousand years earlier. He was circumcised on the eighth day, according to the Law of Moses, and he was zealous to live by that Law.

As a student of the Law in the first century, Paul would have studied the Old Testament Scriptures at a level that would intimidate even some of the most learned Hebrew scholars in the world today. If the later rabbis are a reliable guide to what his education would have looked like, to become a Pharisee, a title that Paul later claimed for himself, he would have had to memorize most or all of the Old Testament. Given his self-professed zeal for the traditions of his fathers (Gal. 1:14), it is more likely than not that he memorized the whole thing.

I’d love to be able to tell other stories about Paul’s upbringing and young adulthood, but we’ve covered just about everything we know about his early life and education. We don’t know if he was ever married, but he was in his midforties and single

when he wrote 1 Corinthians around AD 55. It was unusual for a Pharisee or a prominent Jew to be unmarried, but we also see a pretty significant exception to this rule in the life of Jesus. Some have speculated that Paul's wife died or that she left him when he started to follow Jesus. I'm inclined to think that Paul was likely married at some point. But it is also possible that he was so devoted to studying the Torah that he decided a wife would hold him back. Either way, he was single during his apostolic ministry.

When he finished his education, Paul stayed in Jerusalem and became part of the Pharisees. We remember these guys from the Gospels. Many of them passionately sought to obey the Law—at virtually any cost. They learned it, learned how to keep it, and sought to teach others how to keep it. They were passionate to maintain the purity of the nation and to keep the Gentiles from corrupting them.

The only problem was that many of them also misunderstood the purpose of the Law. Many of them thought that the Law was the be-all and end-all of God's revelation to His people, almost as if the Law existed for the sake of the Law and that obedience to the Law would be the path to winning favor with God. The Law became the fence that separated Jew and Gentile and gave Israel a special status above all other nations. This was likely Paul's attitude toward the Law. He was zealous to keep it—and he would not put up with anyone who tried to undermine it, because he saw this as a threat to Israel's salvation and special status.

We also don't know if Paul ever saw Jesus before His death and resurrection. If he was a Pharisee or a Pharisee-in-training during the years of Jesus' public ministry, it is difficult to imagine that he wouldn't have seen or at least heard about Jesus at some point. Either way, Paul himself never mentions seeing Jesus until later, on the road to Damascus.

“Breathing Threats and Murder”

Within a year or two of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the early Christian movement was gaining momentum in Jerusalem. Thousands of people in Jerusalem had believed in Jesus, were baptized, and became a part of the church. Even though some of the apostles were beaten and thrown in prison, God had delivered them so they could continue preaching and teaching. The final straw for some of the Jewish leaders may have been when many priests believed in Jesus (Acts 6:7). Just after this, as he was proclaiming the good news of Jesus, Stephen, one of the early leaders in the Jerusalem church, was grabbed by the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council). As they listened to his sermon retelling of Israel’s history, these men were incensed. The culmination of Israel’s story, according to Stephen, was not the Law or the temple. The climax of God’s plan for His people was not the restoration of the temple or a group of people who perfectly kept the Law. For Stephen and the other Christians, the culmination of God’s plan for His people was the life, death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus, the true Messiah and Savior. And the Jewish rulers had been a part of His execution, just as their fathers had killed the prophets before them (Acts 7:51–53).

For these men, this was blasphemy! The Pharisees saw themselves as Israel’s leaders and champions, not its villains. And to attack the place of the Law and the temple was just too much. The men of the Sanhedrin took off their coats, picked up stones, and began throwing them at Stephen. Even as he died, he continued to proclaim Jesus, the true Savior and Messiah.

As they prepared to stone Stephen, the men laid their coats at the feet of Paul. This may even symbolize his authority as one of the key leaders in this group. In any case, he was certainly approving of the action and encouraged it to continue. After

Stephen's martyrdom, Paul moved to a whole new level of persecuting the church. Over the next several months or years, he devoted himself to stamping out the followers of Jesus. Acts tells us that Paul was "ravaging the church" (Acts 8:3) and "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). Paul himself wrote that he "persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it" (Gal. 1:13).

Protecting the law and wiping out anyone who undermined it was his self-proclaimed mission from God, so Paul took it upon himself to round up as many Christians as he could find in Jerusalem. He had to stop them from spreading their heresy about a Messiah who rose from the dead and claimed to be greater than the Law itself. When he heard about this message spreading beyond Jerusalem to places like Damascus, he had to go there and stop these heretics. And so, Paul set out for Damascus with official authorization from the high priest in Jerusalem to arrest any followers of Jesus, this pretend Messiah. However, his trip did not go as planned. As he traveled to Damascus, he was confronted by the resurrected Lord Himself.

We can point to many differences in their upbringing and early life, but both James and Paul were raised to follow the Law and to be devoted to the God of Israel. Both rejected Jesus' claim to be the Messiah when they first heard, and both encountered the risen Lord, and their lives were set on a new trajectory.