

WAS THE JAMES MENTIONED AS JESUS' BROTHER IN JOSEPHUS THE NEW TESTAMENT JAMES?

Josephus the historian of Jesus's time seems to have not known of Jesus and his references to him are suspicious. A testimony that reads like a Christian creed appears. But in his Book 20 of Jewish Antiquities he writes of James the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ. That seems on the face of it to be a persuasive reference.

The text is thought to mention the same James that appears in the New Testament. We read there of the apostle James the Son of Alphaeus. Jerome believed this was the James who was known as the brother of Jesus. Hippolytus wrote "James the son of Alphaeus, when preaching in Jerusalem was stoned to death by the Jews, and was buried there beside the temple." This matches Josephus except for the temple bit. Book 20 is probably not calling James the literal brother of Jesus.

Jerome said that the James was also the same person as James the Lesser.

A James died in the book of Acts by beheading and he was the brother of John. He is not the James mentioned in Josephus for he died too early.

When Jesus was ministering, his brother James, did not believe in him according to Mark 3:31-35, Matthew 12:46-50, Luke 8:19-21 and John 7:3-5. If James did not believe in Jesus at the time he died then that explains his fame among the Jews. He could even have been calling himself brother of the so-called Christ.

There is a James whom Paul mentions in the Galatians letter who he describes as the brother of Jesus. To call a man the brother of Jesus in literal sounding terms when that man is not the brother of Jesus can only mean either that Paul is lying or brother of Jesus is a honorific title not a literal one. Either way, if Josephus calls James Jesus' brother it is not then necessarily a hint that Jesus was real. Paul declared Onesimus the brother of Philemon though he was not. In several places brothers of the Lord is metaphorical. See Matthew 24, 3 John 3,5, 10 and 1 Corinthians 9:5.

Here is a list of when the New Testament uses brother when it may not meant and at times definitely cannot mean real brother in the genetic sense:

Let us look for "brother" (adelphos) in the epistles.

Romans 16:23 – our brother Quartus.

1 Corinthians 1:1 – Paul . . . and our brother Sosthenes

1 Corinthians 5:11 – you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is immoral or greedy

1 Corinthians 7:12 – If any brother has an unbelieving wife

1 Corinthians 8:13 – If food causes my brother to stumble . . . I will not cause my brother to fall

1 Corinthians 16:11-12 – I am expecting Timothy along with the brothers. As for brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers.

2 Corinthians 2:13 – . . . because I did not find my brother Titus there.

2 Corinthians 8:18 – We are sending with him the brother who is praised by all the churches.

Philippians 2:25 – . . . to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-worker

Colossians 4:7 – Tychicus is a dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 3:2 – Timothy, our brother and fellow-worker of God in the gospel of Christ.

1 Timothy 3:15 – Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

1 Peter 5:12 – Silvanus, the faithful brother.

2 Peter 3:15 – Paul, our friend and brother.

Revelation 1:9 – I, John, your brother, who share with you.

Lot was called Abraham's brother in Genesis 14 despite being his nephew.

The Catholic Church denies Jesus had real brothers and sisters and the brothers and sisters mentioned in the Bible were just close relatives. So James was a cousin perhaps. Why is John the Baptist who was related to Jesus - their mothers were cousins - not called a brother? It is hard to understand.

If James who is called Jesus' brother by Josephus who certainly would have meant it literally for he was not going to teach history to the Romans as if they were Jews who knew of the loose use of the terms brother and sister is not a literal brother then the case for a non-historical Jesus might be made. It is that if Jesus was not literally James brother and Josephus thought he was then Josephus couldn't find out much about Jesus if anything. Jesus was obscure enough to not exist.

Even if there was a usage among Jews that was slack with the terms that does not mean the gospels followed that usage. So Jesus could be declared in them to be true literal brother. No tradition in a nation is completely nationwide. Not all Christians in Christian countries celebrate Christmas.

Another James

There would have been lots of Jameses who died over religion. That is why it is possible that the descriptive, "brother of the so-called Christ" could have been written in the margin and ended up in the official text through a copyists mistake.

There may have been three James who are often confused with one another. The apostle James was killed in the early days of the Church, then there was another James the apostle it seems and then there was the James who was called the brother of the Lord.

Why did Josephus not clarify that he did not mean the another Christian James but the blood-brother of Jesus? Jesus would have called the other James he knew brothers as well for Jesus said that anybody who obeys God is his brother and his mother (Mark 3:34). So would Josephus call a man Jesus' brother and not clearly state that he was a blood-brother if that was what he was? Did Josephus not know that Christians called every Christian man a brother. That is impossible to believe so somebody did add in the words brother of the so-called Christ. They did it to manufacture evidence that Jesus lived. There could be no other possible motive.

The lack of clarity might mean that Josephus was using hearsay. It is possible also that calling James the brother of the so-called Christ may have been a sneer. He gives no hint that he cares for James. If it was a sneer then it is just a sneer and not a declaration that Jesus existed for you could mock a man by linking him to his non-existent brother. Jesus could be the so-called Christ in the sense that he was a fake king or a fictitious person. You might call a man who some said existed but who you knew didn't a so-called man and that might be what Josephus is doing here. He could be calling Jesus the so-called Christ as in so-called man. The gospels may indicate that a double pretended to be Jesus after his death and Jesus was not recognised by people who saw him every day the night they arrested him. This is a clear indication that there were some people pretending to be Jesus. When the apostles had their hallucinations of a man having come back from the dead it was only natural that some people would play tricks on the weirdos. Maybe James was the brother of one of these impostors and sceptics knew that. Was that what Josephus was referring to?

Brother of Christ might have been James' title. And Josephus may be sneeringly changing it to brother of the so-called Christ. In that case, it would tell us nothing about Jesus' existence or non-existence.

There is evidence that seems to indicate that there would have been a number of Jesuses who claimed to be Messiahs. Palestine at the time was a hotbed of religious cultism especially since many believed that Daniel had predicted that the Messiah was due in those days. Jesus was a very common name so common-sense is enough to verify what I am saying. James sounds like the brother of another Jesus and not the one we know and love.

Josephus did not know about the apostle James who was called the son of Alphaeus. Modern scholars reject the ancient view that this James is the brother of the Lord (NAB, Biblical Dictionary and Concordance, page 95) or (obviously) the same person as James son of Zebedee another apostle. So if James son of Alphaeus was the one meant he was not the blood brother of Jesus. Since erroneous tradition said he was the brother of Jesus it would follow that a forger inserted the words, brother of the so-called Christ.

The James that Josephus supposedly wrote about was not an important person known in Rome. He was a nobody who was surrounded by trouble in Jerusalem and raised the murderous ire of the Jews who were his brethren. He would have been less known and popular than the other Jameses for he confined himself to the Jews and Israel. Yet the text runs as if he were well-known in Rome which is unlikely.

If it was another James, an apostle, who was meant he would have been one of the best known Christians. That would explain why the text speaks of him as if he were well-known to the Roman readers. But the apostle was not the brother of the so-called Christ. If a James who was not the brother of the so-called Christ was the person who was meant then either the words, brother of the so-called Christ are forged or they are not literal. Either way, the case for a historical Jesus based on the references in Josephus disappears.

Did the James in Josephus have a brother who perhaps leaped on the Jesus bandwagon and claimed to be Christ? It could have been just like how many Mormons claimed to be prophets and true heads of the Church after Joseph Smith was shot dead. Josephus gives no evidence for the existence of our Jesus Christ.

Why did Josephus write that James was the brother Jesus of the so-called Christ and not say that he was the brother of Jesus who was crucified by Pilate? That would be clearer and would have been a slap against Jesus for crucifixion was considered a disgrace. It was preferable to forget about people who claimed to be Christ and not mention that unless it was totally necessary for the less attention Christs got with their alleged royal bloodlines got the safer it was for the Roman Empire. Some say the reason was that he had already written that Jesus was crucified in the Testament. But it is clear from the text that it could stand on its own and be the only reference to Jesus in Josephus. In that case, it would mean that Jesus was too nebulous to write anything concrete about. The James he might have meant used the brother of the Lord and the brother of the Christ expressions as titles so we need not assume that the reference proves that somebody thought that James was his literal brother.

Page 40 of *He Walked Among Us* states that Josephus had to be careful not to write about all the Messiahs Israel had for he was writing to Romans about Jews and to portray the Jews in a more favourable way so that Romans would have less to fear from them. That is pure speculation. This book is not in a position to judge what Josephus' motives were.

The gospels say that the Jews hated Jesus and saw no problem with anybody degrading his name. They supposedly slandered him themselves to save their own reputation. If anything, Josephus concentrating on Jesus would have assured Rome that the Jews could be very anti where claimants to Christhood were concerned.

Light from Hebrews

The Epistle to the Hebrews may be from 70AD or shortly before the Temple was destroyed. It was written to Jewish Christians because the argumentation against priests and Temples and sacrifices in it and its extensive use of the Old Testament would not have been deployed for Gentile Christians who were unfamiliar with this ritualism and scripture. It would have been written to Jewish Christians in Palestine for that is where most of them were. The letter was known as the Epistle to the Hebrews from the first meaning it would have been sent to Jerusalem the HQ of the Jewish Christians for it was for all of them. It was written to Jewish Christians in Palestine but meant for Jewish Christians everywhere and there were some of them in Rome.

Hebrews 12:3 tells them to think of Jesus who endured a lot of abuse from sinners so that they may feel stronger knowing Jesus went through worse than they did at the hands of hostile people. Verse 12:4 tells us something very interesting. It says that none of them have resisted this abuse until their blood was shed. This tells us that the account in Josephus about James dying at the hands of a lynch mob over religious differences in 64 AD and the Book of Acts saying about the other James dying in 42AD by the sword of Herod's emissary are both lies. It also indicates that the stories in Acts about the murderous persecution of the Church and its claim that Paul was a murderer of Christians are fiction. Basically it means that some Christian inserted in Josephus the entire stuff about James the brother of the so-called Christ being persecuted to death.

Apocalypses of James

The heretical apocalypses of James are deemed to know of some traditions about James. They say James was in hiding in Pella when the Romans invaded Jerusalem in 70 AD. Josephus stated that James was eight years dead by that stage. Eusebius said the same thing but he does not count for he took the information from Josephus. Theudas is named as the father of James. So there was a tradition that James was not the son of Jesus' father or his foster-father. There was a tradition that Josephus might not have been accurate.

Finally

The Jesus reference fails to give us confidence that Josephus had any evidence about Jesus. It makes the view that Jesus was a legend quite legitimate.

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Josephus Unbound by Earl Doherty
<http://human.st/jesuspuzzle/supp10.htm> IT CANNOT BE OVERSTRESSED HOW IMPORTANT READING THIS SITE IS. One major point it makes is that Josephus would not have called James the brother of the so-called Christ for he never explained to his readers who would have been unfamiliar with the title Christ what a Christ was. Evidence from Origen and Eusebius who referred to a missing line from the place where this reference occurs indicates that tampering did happen here. Josephus might however not have meant that Christ was a man. James could have been the brother of a Spiritual Christ meaning that James was a spiritual being incarnate and literally the brother of this being but not a biological brother. Josephus speaks of this Christ in concrete terms not because he was a man but because many said they had visions of him so Josephus believed in his existence. I add another possibility. Perhaps brother of the so-called Christ was James' nickname? Perhaps it was a mock title given to him by his Jewish enemies? This could be poking fun at his honouring a non-existent Messiah. He was writing for some Jews though it was mainly Romans so it is possible. Josephus might not have been mocking James but stating his nickname as an irony. Josephus did do things like that at times. We have seen that he did not explain the nickname Christ.

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