

James the Son of Alphaeus

October 9, 2009

GOSPEL: Luke 10:16-21

EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16

James was the son of Alphaeus, who was also called Cleopas. One of James' brothers, Matthew, was a member of the Twelve Apostles (Mark 2:14) along with James. Since Alphaeus (Cleopas) was the brother of Joseph, the Betrothed of the Virgin Mary, James was Jesus' step cousin. In trying to understand Jesus' extended family, there were three men named James, which makes things confusing. Figure 1 should be consulted for details concerning all the Lord's relatives. The Scriptures record James' father, Alphaeus (Cleopas), along with the Evangelist Luke, meeting the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-18). James' mother, Mary, the wife of Clopas, was one of the myrrh-bearing women at the foot of the Cross, and at the Tomb (John 19:25).

James the Son of Alphaeus Versus James the Lord's Brother

Shortly after the Ascension, while James the son of Alphaeus was about to begin his missionary journeys abroad, Peter, James Zebedee and John appointed James the Lord's brother as Bishop of Jerusalem. Clement of Rome¹ and Eusebius² stated that Peter, James and John did not strive after honor for themselves, and therefore chose James the Lord's brother as Bishop rather than themselves. James the Lord's brother served as Bishop until c. 62 AD, when he was murdered by the Jewish leaders. Simeon, the other brother of James the son of Alphaeus and one of the Seventy, and was appointed as the second Bishop of Jerusalem³ after the martyrdom of James the Lord's brother. The Apostles at that time felt that one of the Lord's kinsmen should be Bishop of Jerusalem after James.

There is some confusion today, especially in the West, regarding James the son of Alphaeus. In the West, some say that James the Lord's brother and James the son of Alphaeus were the same person⁴. In the East, it is the teaching of the Church that they were distinct persons. James the Lord's brother never left Judea, but spent his time as a shepherd for the Jews, and pleading for mercy for his people, until he was martyred in front of the Temple in Jerusalem. James the son of Alphaeus was eventually crucified in Egypt.

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¹ Clement, Hypotyposes, Book 6. This document is now lost, but it is quoted by Eusebius.

² Eusebius, Church History, II, 1.

³ Hegesippus, "Concerning His Journey to Rome, and the Jewish Sects", Remains of the 2nd and 3rd Centuries, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁴ See for example the discussions for and against contained in the following:

Roberts and Donaldson, "Fragments of Papias", 9-10, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1

Hippolytus, "On the Twelve Apostles", 9.

Jerome, "The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary", ch. 13-19, Against Helvidius, where Jerome refers to the following references.

Tertullian, "On the Flesh of Christ", II, v, 7.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, xi, 6-8; III, xv, 1-3; III, xxi, 1-3; V, I, 1-3.

Ignatius, "To the Trallians", ch. 11.

At the Council of Jerusalem in 48 AD, James the Lord's brother, was clearly the authority figure in Jerusalem. After everyone had spoken, James the Lord's brother answered saying, "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God..." (Acts 15:13, 19). Then it pleased the Apostles and elders with the whole church to send chosen men: Joseph (Barsabas), i.e. James' brother, and Silas with a letter to the Gentile churches documenting this.

We see James the Lord's brother in this position much earlier also. Paul's conversion was about 34 AD. Three years after this (or 37 AD) Paul went to Jerusalem, but had to leave after 15 days due to an assassination plot (Galatians 1:18, Acts 9:26-30). During those 15 days, Paul only saw Peter and James the Lord's brother; he saw none of the rest of the Twelve (Galatians 1:19). Later on, he saw the Apostle John and remarked that James the Lord's brother, Peter and John were the pillars of the Jerusalem Church (Galatians 2:9). That this is James the Lord's brother, and not James the brother of John, is clear from Acts 12:2. James the brother of John was martyred by Herod in 44 AD, right after returning from Spain, or four years before the Council of Jerusalem. During all this time, James the son of Alphaeus was away evangelizing the Gentile nations and was finally crucified in Egypt.

From iconographic tradition⁵, James the son of Alphaeus is portrayed as a young man with a short beard, while James the Lord's brother is portrayed as an old man with a long beard. See Figures 2 and 3 for details. As cousins, they naturally resemble each other. This may have led some to think that the old man is the same person as the young man, but later in life. Some confusion about their identity is understandable, but the icons portray different people.

James in the First Year of the Church

In the first year of the Church, the Book of Acts describes several encounters between the Apostles and the religious leaders. In all cases, either Peter or John is quoted as being the spokesman for the Apostles. On Pentecost, Peter was described "standing with the Eleven" (Acts 2:14) in his message to the people who were confused by the events taking place. When Peter and John healed the lame man, the man held onto both Peter and John, but Peter was the one who spoke to the people about what had happened (Acts 3:1-12). When Peter and John were arrested for this, it was Peter who spoke in their defense (Acts 4:1-8). When the Twelve were arrested and put in prison, an angel let them out during the night. Summoned before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, the account reads that Peter *and the other Apostles answered* and said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:17-29).

Few details are given in Acts regarding the exact accusations that were brought against the Apostles, or who of the Twelve answered these accusations. Pseudo Clement⁶ records one example where James responded:

"Then a certain Pharisee, hearing this, chided Philip because he put Jesus on a level with Moses. To whom Bartholomew boldly declared that we do not only say that Jesus was equal to Moses, but that He was greater than he, because Moses was indeed a prophet, as Jesus was also, but that Moses was not the Christ, as Jesus was. And therefore He is doubtless greater who is both a prophet and the

⁵ Paul Hetherington, *The 'Painter's Manual' of Dionysius of Fournia*, p. 53, Oakwood Publications, 1996.

⁶ Pseudo-Clement, *Recognitions of Clement*, I, 59.

Christ, than he who is only a prophet. After following out this train of argument, he stopped.

After him James the son of Alphaeus gave an address to the people to show that we are not to believe on Jesus just on the ground that the prophets foretold concerning Him. But rather that we are to believe the prophets, that they were really prophets, because the Christ bears testimony to them. For it is the presence and coming of Christ that show that they are truly prophets: for testimony must be born by the superior to his inferiors, not by the inferiors to their superior. After these and many similar statements, James also was silent. After him Lebbaeus (i.e. Jude, Matthew 10:3) began vehemently to charge it upon the people that they did not believe in Jesus, who had done them so much good by teaching them the things that are of God, by comforting the afflicted, healing the sick, relieving the poor. Yet for all these benefits their return had been hatred and death. When he had declared these and many more such things to the people, he ceased”.

Following the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, 30 AD, the Church had peace for exactly one year⁷. At the time of Pentecost 31 AD, Stephen was stoned (Acts 7) along with Deacon Nicanor (Acts 6:5) and 200 others. As a result, the Church was scattered and those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:4). During this first year of the Church, the Twelve were still together in Jerusalem (Acts 6:2). However, following the ordination of the first seven “deacons” (Acts 6:6), the Twelve are never mentioned as being all together for the rest of the New Testament.

During this year of peace, James’ father, Alphaeus (Cleopas) died. Alphaeus was probably quite old by this time, since his brother, Joseph, the Betrothed of the Virgin Mary had died about 5 years earlier⁸ at the age of 110. There is no mention of Alphaeus (Cleopas) in any of the literature following Pentecost, whereas he was prominent before that time (Luke 24:18). James’ mother, Mary the wife of Clopas, who was now a widow, left Jerusalem about this time with James the son of Zebedee to help with the missionary work in Spain.

In making preparations for their various missionary journeys, the Twelve had cast lots to divide up the world into regions⁹ where each of the Twelve had one lot. The lot for James the son of Alphaeus included Egypt, but may have included other areas of the world as well. Also during this first year, Matthew had finished writing his Gospel in Hebrew¹⁰, and the Twelve had finished drafting¹¹ what was later called “The Apostles’ Creed”. The Creed was a common statement of the Faith that they and their successors could use as a metric, since they realized that they may never see each other again.

⁷ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27.

⁸ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 31.

⁹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 6, October 9, November 30.

¹⁰ For details of Matthew’s draft of his Gospel in Hebrew, see the separate study on the life of Matthew.

¹¹ Rufinus, A Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed, Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, v. 3.

The Missionary Journeys of James

We have very little information about James' missionary journeys. A brief summary¹² of his work reads as follows:

“Having received, the Holy Spirit, Who descended upon them in the likeness of tongues of fire, with the other apostles, James went to the Gentiles to preach Christ and guide the erring to the path of salvation. Aflame with the fire of divine zeal, he burned up the thorns of ungodliness, smashed idols to pieces, destroyed their temples, healed diverse illnesses, drove evil spirits out of people, and brought a great multitude of people to Christ. For this he acquired for himself a new name, the ‘Divine Seed’. Because he sowed the seed of the Word of God in men's hearts, planted faith and grew piety, he was called the ‘Divine Seed’”.

“Going about many lands, he sowed the seed of heaven, gathered in the harvest of men's salvation, and ended his earthly course in the steps of Christ. Being an emulator of the sufferings of Christ, he surrendered his spirit into the hands of God while nailed to a cross in Egypt.”

“Then this ‘Divine Seed’, the holy James, was gathered into the heavenly granary with the fruits he bore a hundredfold. And there, delighting in the vision of the countenance of God, he intercedes for us by his supplications, that we too may win such delight.”

Another traditional account¹³ of James' missionary work reads as follows.

“After the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, it fell to the lot of the Apostle James to preach Christ's Gospel in Eleutheropolis and the surrounding area, and then in Egypt, where he suffered for his Savior. With great power, both in word and in act, James spread abroad the saving news of the incarnate Word of God, rooting out idol worship, driving demons out of men, healing all manner of sickness and disease in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. His labors and his zeal were crowned with great success. Many pagans came to believe in Christ the Lord, Churches were founded and set in order, and priests and Bishops were made. He suffered in Egypt in the town of Ostracina, being crucified by the pagans. Thus this great and wonderful Apostle of Christ went to the heavenly Kingdom, to reign forever with the King of Glory”.

The hymns of the Church speak of James' work among the Gentiles as follows:

“As radiant as the sun¹⁴ you shown forth, O Apostle, with the beams of the Spirit, and have illumined the whole world with divine knowledge, and driven away the darkness of polytheism with your divine preaching. Celebrating your all-splendid and right laudable festival today, we glorify you with piety. You thundered forth sacred and saving doctrines upon the whole world, cleansed all creation of the madness of idolatry, and enlightened the people with the radiance of the knowledge of God. Demolishing the temples of the idols through grace, you

¹² Isaac Lambertsen, *The Lives of the Holy Apostles*, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, pp. 218-220. This is a translation from the following:

The Lives of the Saints in the Russian Language, According to the Menology of St. Dimitri of Rostov, Moscow, Synodal Press, 1904, v. 2, (October) pp. 166-167.

¹³ Nickolai Velimirovic, *Prologue From Ochrid*, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 9.

¹⁴ “Antiphon for Vespers of the Commemoration of the Apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus”, October 9th, *Russian Menaion*, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

raised up Churches to the praise of our God. Seated in the heights of divine knowledge, O James, you received the grace of the Spirit, which appeared to you in the guise of fire and consumed all the idolatrous filth of impiety with a tongue of flame. Wherefore we praise you as an Apostle and herald of God, celebrating today your holy festival. Receiving the grace of the divine Spirit, O James, you were numbered among the sacred choir of the Apostles. By His descent from the heavens and His mighty inspiration, He illumined you with a tongue of fire, and you consumed the thorny ungodliness of the heathen”.

“Illumining those¹⁵ that sat in the darkness of ignorance with the lightning flashes of your preaching, you showed them forth as children of our God and Master for the sake of their faith. His sufferings and death you emulated and were an inheritor of glory, in that you were wise and divinely eloquent, a disciple of Truth. Forsaking earthly things, you followed after Christ. Signed with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you were sent by Him to the nations that had fallen into perdition, that you turn men to the light of knowledge of God. Having completed the struggles of your divine suffering and diverse torments, you committed your soul unto Christ, O Apostle James. You received invincible authority and power over the demons to drive away their dark princes with the name of Christ. You passed over the earth, shedding light like the sun, and taught all the nations, preaching the first salvific coming of Christ. As an instrument well wrought by the skill of God, O Apostle James, you committed yourself to summon the nations, by your words and acts teaching them to acknowledge Christ. And you enlightened all to confess the true divinity of Jesus, the Savior of our souls”.

“The glorious apostle¹⁶ pursued the nations, teaching the ends of the earth to worship You with the Father and the Spirit, O Christ God. For his sake establish Your Church, and send down your blessing upon the faithful, O only Merciful One, Who loves mankind. Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, emitted you like a ray, to enlighten the whole world. And with your divine supplications you illumine and enlighten with the never-waning light of God all who with faith celebrate your holy memory. We magnify you, O holy Apostle James, and we honor the pangs and labors whereby you struggled in the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ”.

“O James, disciple¹⁷ of Christ and seer of God, grant your hand to me who have striven to praise your honored Feast, and by your supplications shine forth light unto my heart. Watered with streams of divine wisdom, you flowed forth from the paradise of sweetness like a river, and truly have irrigated the face of the earth with torrents of piety”.

“The Lord Himself¹⁸, Who alone is holy, numbered you among the honored choir of His disciples, foreseeing the honor and splendor of your life. Full of the miracles of the divine Spirit, O herald of God, you worked wonders, dispelled infirmities; and freed men from the wickedness of the evil spirits. The effulgence of God, which descended upon your heart, made it divinely radiant, and in manner past understanding made it full of the gifts of the Spirit”.

“As one who conversed¹⁹ with the Noetic Sun, you assimilated the rays thereof. And while He is by essence the primal Light, you became a secondary luminary through grace. Possessed of a most pure intelligence, and having acquired a radiant and pure heart, you beheld the incarnate God, Who is incomprehensible to the mind. Every prophecy and every law inclines

¹⁵ “Stichera for Vespers of the Commemoration of the Apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus”, October 9th, [Russian Menaion](#), St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

¹⁶ “Stichera for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus”, October 9th, [Russian Menaion](#), St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

¹⁷ “Ode I for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus”, October 9th, [Russian Menaion](#), St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

¹⁸ “Ode IV for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus”, October 9th, [Russian Menaion](#), St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

¹⁹ “Ode V for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus”, October 9th, [Russian Menaion](#), St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

toward you, O disciple who are most rich; for you saw with your own eyes Him Who of old was proclaimed by them”.

“Your beautiful feet²⁰ truly proclaim the glad tidings of transcendent peace, and your mind is excellent, O most honored disciple of Christ. It was granted to you to understand and preach the awesome mystery of the incarnation of God, O ever-memorable James, who received pristine rays of light from the Most High Himself. Shining with the splendors of ineffable light as is meet, earnestly pray for those who celebrate your all-honorable memory. With praises let us all bless the divine herald James, who steadfastly instilled the dogmas of wisdom in the souls of the pious”.

“The multitudes²¹ of the nations have you as a divine seed illumined by the splendors and radiance of the Spirit. Adorned with divinely given wisdom, you destroyed the wisdom of the world, speaking out with godly wisdom. Your sound hath gone forth into all the earth like thunder, O Apostle James, and you proclaimed the incarnate Word to all lands, preaching Him as is meet”.

“Truly taught the mysteries²² of heaven as a sacred disciple, O blessed apostle, you passed through the whole world, preaching aloud the word of the Faith of Christ, and giving instruction through ineffable grace. As one rich and blessed, granted all beatitude, you conversed with and accompanied the Master, and were enriched truly in your final portion”.

“O blessed one²³, you appeared to the world flashing like lightning, drawing those who from of old have been sitting in the darkness and shadow of ignorance toward the never-waning light of the incarnate Only-Begotten Son, Whose witness and true servant you were, and Whom we magnify. Receiving the breath of the tempest borne down from the heavens, and enriched by the Spirit’s tongue of fire, you burned up the ungodly wisdom of the world like thorns, shining with the luminous rays of the proclamation of Christ, and dispelling the darkness. O divinely eloquent Apostle James, accept the hymn of supplication which we offer to you, celebrating your all-honored and all-radiant memory”.

“We acknowledge you²⁴ not as the son of Alphaeus, but as the disciple of the Word, O James, glory of the apostles; for you manifestly received divine effulgence and the grace of miracles, to drive away the infirmities of those who celebrate your most sacred memory with faith”.

“With the rod of grace²⁵ you drew men from the depths of vanity. O James, obedient to your Teacher, He enlightened your understanding in all things and showed you forth as an apostle and honored divine herald of His unapproachable divinity. The effulgence of the Spirit descended upon you in the guise of fire, and made you a divine receptacle who quickly drove away the darkness of ungodliness. You illumined the world with the radiance of your most wise words, O you who give utterance to mysteries. Illumining those who sat in the darkness of ignorance with the lightning-flashes of your preaching, you showed them to be children of God the Master because of their faith. And you emulated His sufferings and death, and have become an heir to His glory, in that you are wise and divinely eloquent, a disciple most true. Forsaking earthly things, you followed after Christ; and, sealed with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you

²⁰ “Ode VI for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus”, October 9th, [Russian Menaion](#), St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

²¹ “Ode VII for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus”, October 9th, [Russian Menaion](#), St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

²² “Ode VIII for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus”, October 9th, [Russian Menaion](#), St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

²³ “Ode IX for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus”, October 9th, [Russian Menaion](#), St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

²⁴ “Exapostilarion for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus”, October 9th, [Russian Menaion](#), St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

²⁵ “Four Stichera for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus”, October 9th, [Russian Menaion](#), St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

were sent by Him to nations, which were perishing, to convert men to the light of the knowledge of God. And, finishing the struggles of your divine suffering and diverse torments, you committed your soul to Christ. Him entreat that He grant us great mercy”.

FIGURE 1

FAMILY TREE OF JESUS

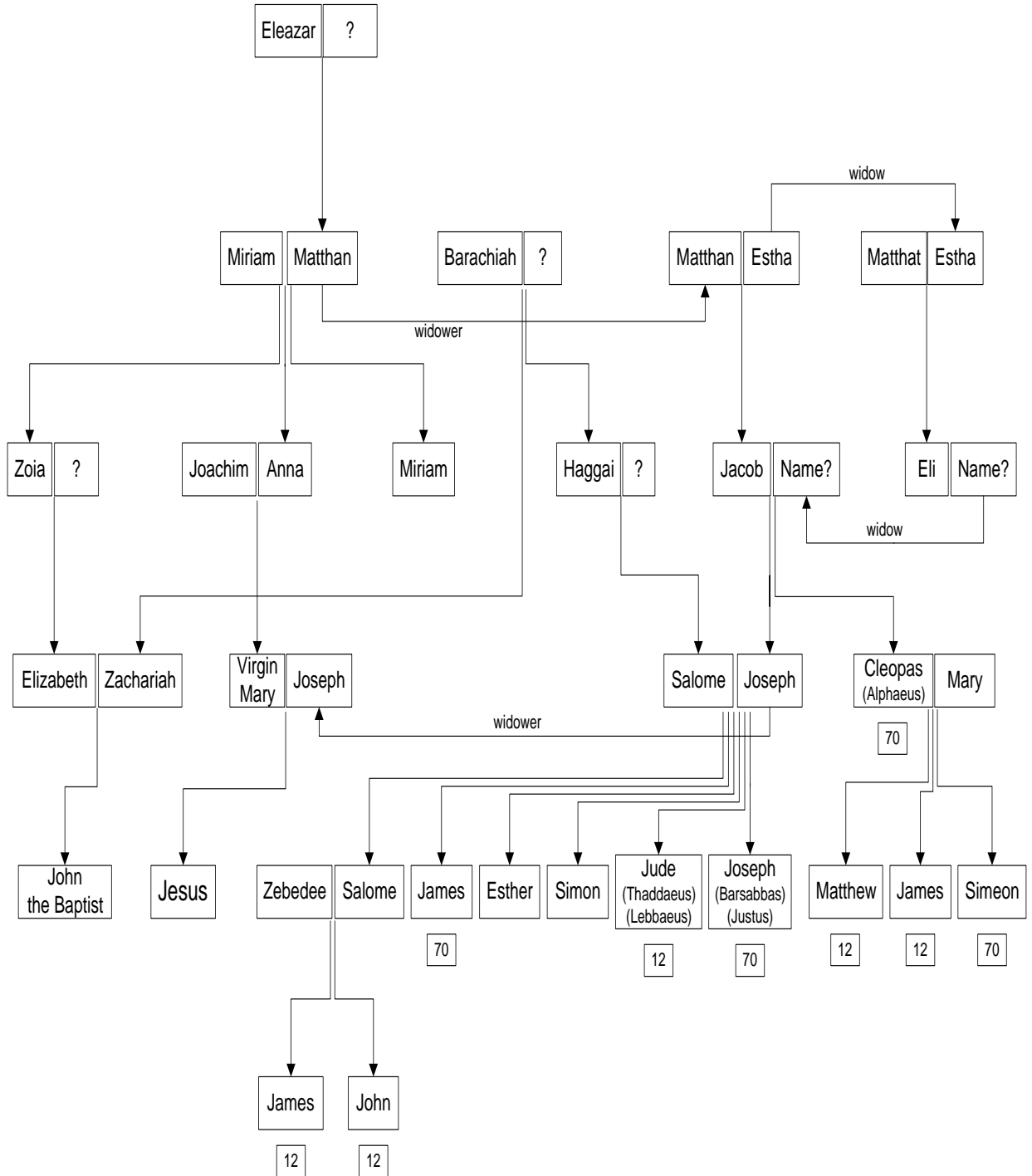


Figure 2
James the Son of Alphaeus



Figure 3
James the Lord's Brother

