

James the Son of Alphaeus

Many children learn the “apostles’ song” at a young age. In this song, the children sing, “James, the one they called ‘the Less.’” This title comes from Mark 15:40 where we learn “Mary” was “*the mother of James the Less and of Joses.*” This title was likely given to James, the son of Alphaeus to distinguish him from James, the son of Zebedee and “because he might be little of stature” (Gill).

This James is described as “*James the son of Alphaeus*” in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). Yet, much controversy exists over the identity of the later references to James in the Scriptural record.

Faussett’s Bible [Dictionary](#) takes the position that “*James the son of Alphaeus*” is the same James identified as “*the Lord’s brother*” in Scriptures (Galatians 1:19; James 1:1). Most Catholic theologians also take this position. Yet, to do so requires a lot of supposition. For example, they suppose the James who is called “*the Lord’s brother*” was actually a “cousin.” They must do this because clearly “*James the son of Alphaeus*” could not have been a full-blooded brother to “*Jesus the son of Joseph*” (Luke 3:23). So, they claim the word “brother” can be used in a broad sense to mean “cousin.” While this could be true, there was a Greek word that could have been used if “cousin” was the intended meaning. The word translated “*cousin*” in Luke 1:36 to describe Mary’s relationship to Elizabeth is different than “*brother*” in Galatians 1:19 and James 1:1.

They also must suppose Mary, the mother of [Jesus](#) had a sister with the same name. After all, we do know “*Mary*” was “*the mother of James the Less*” (Mark 15:40). Such may work with George Foreman (he named all his sons “George”) and on the Bob Newhart show (“Hi, my name is Darrell this is my other brother Darrell”) but it is an unlikely scenario lacking proof.

Yet, the biggest problem these proponents face is the fact Jesus’ brothers (which they believe were cousins) are said to have been unbelievers prior to the resurrection (see Mark 3:31-35; 6:3). John 7:5 says, “*For even His brothers did not believe in Him.*” Therefore, if James of Alphaeus was the “brother” (meaning “cousin”) of Jesus then how was he appointed an apostle while in his unbelief? Of course, the theologians explain this away too. They claim some of the cousins disbelieved but not all of them. Again, this is assumption.

Instead of believing these suppositions (all created to support the false doctrine of the “perpetual virginity” of Mary, just believe in the Scriptures. There were three men described as “*apostles*” who were named James in the [Bible](#)!

James, the son of Zebedee, was martyred in Acts 12:2. Therefore, any later references to James cannot refer to him. James, the Lord’s brother, is described as an “*apostle*” in Galatians 1:19. One qualification of an “*apostle*” was being an eyewitness of the resurrection (James 1:22). This James is likely listed separately from “*the twelve*” because he was not among the original apostles due to his previous unbelief (John 7:5; 1 Corinthians 15:5-7). It was this James whom Paul conferred with in “*Jerusalem*” (Galatians 1:18-19; Acts 15). Any later reference in Acts to James refers to the Lord’s brother since it is never stated otherwise. Clearly, the epistle of James was written by the Lord’s brother, not the son of Alphaeus (James 1:1).

Therefore, all we know Scripturally of the apostle James, the son of Alphaeus, was that his mother was present at the resurrection (Mark 15:40), and his brother, Joses, was also a believer.