



Applied Faith Men's Bible Study

South Hills Baptist Church

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The Apostles, James the Lesser and Matthias

Lesson #8

Lesson #36

James the Lesser

The Apostle James, son of Alphaeus, was also known as James the Less, or James the Lesser. He's not to be confused with James the son of Zebedee, brother of the Apostle John.

A third James appears in the New Testament. He was the brother of the Lord, a leader in the Jerusalem church, and writer of the book of James.

James of Alphaeus is named in each listing of the 12 disciples, always appearing ninth in order.

The Apostle Matthew (called Levi, the tax collector before becoming a follower of Christ), is also identified in Mark 2:14 as the son

of Alphaeus, yet scholars doubt he and James were brothers. Never in the Gospels are the two disciples connected.

The title "James the Lesser" or "the Little," helps to distinguish him from the Apostle James, son of Zebedee, who was part of Jesus' inner circle of three and the first disciple to be martyred. James the Lesser may have been younger or smaller in stature than Zebedee's son, as the Greek word for "the less", mikros, conveys both meanings.

Although it's argued by scholars, some believe James the Lesser was the disciple who first witnessed the risen Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:7:

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. (ESV)
Beyond this, Scripture reveals nothing more about James the Lesser.

Accomplishments of James the Lesser

James was hand-picked by Jesus Christ to be a disciple.

He was present with the 11 apostles in the upper room of Jerusalem after Christ ascended to heaven. He may have been the first disciple to see the risen Savior.

Although his accomplishments remain unknown to us today, James may simply have been overshadowed by the more prominent apostles. Even still, being named among the twelve was no small achievement.

Weaknesses

Like the other disciples, James deserted the Lord during his trial and crucifixion.

Life Lessons

While James the Lesser is one of the least known of the 12, we can't overlook the fact that each of these men sacrificed everything to follow the Lord. In Luke 18:28, their spokesman Peter said, "We have left all we had to follow you!" (NIV)

They gave up family, friends, homes, jobs, and all things familiar to answer Christ's call.

These ordinary men who did extraordinary things for God, set the example for us. They formed the foundation of the Christian church, initiating a movement that steadily spread across the face of the earth. We are part of that movement today.

For all we know, "Little James" was an unsung hero of faith. Evidently, he did not seek recognition or fame, for he received no glory or credit for his service to Christ. Perhaps the nugget of truth we can take from the altogether obscure life of James is reflected in this Psalm:

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory ...

(Psalm 115:1, ESV)

Matthias

Matthias, short for the name Mattathias, means "gift of Yahweh." This meaning is fitting, for Matthias became one of the Twelve, replacing Judas after that disciple's betrayal of Jesus.

We meet Matthias after Jesus had ascended back to heaven. About 120 disciples gathered in Jerusalem for fellowship and prayer, awaiting Jesus' promise of His Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–8). Peter, knowing the Scriptures were to be fulfilled, proposed that another man be chosen to take Judas Iscariot's place

among the Twelve to maintain their number and their ministry. Peter based his suggestion on Psalm 109:8, “May another take his place of leadership,” and Psalm 69:25, “May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents” (cf. Acts 1:20–26).

Matthias and Joseph (also called Justus and Barsabbas) were selected as candidates for this particular ministry, as both met the qualifications laid out by Peter. Both Matthias and Joseph had been faithful followers of Jesus “the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us” (Acts 1:21–22). The gospels do not mention these two disciples by name, but we know there were at least 72 other men, besides the Twelve, whom the Lord had commissioned for ministry (Luke 10:1). The details of Matthias’s and Joseph’s faithfulness are hidden from our view. Yet Peter and the others were familiar with these men, and their constant, faithful discipleship made them stand out as worthy candidates to “become a witness with [the apostles] of his resurrection” (Acts 1:22).

After praying together, the disciples cast lots to discern who the chosen man would be, and the lot fell to Matthias. Trusting that God’s hand was in these proceedings, the other apostles received Matthias as the replacement for Judas (Acts 1:24–26). Nothing else is known of Matthias; he is not mentioned again in the Bible.

Various traditions have developed to fill in the details of the future ministry of Matthias. One says that Matthias evangelized in Ethiopia, where he was martyred. Another says that Matthias traveled to Damascus and later died in Judea. A third tradition says that Matthias spent most of his time in Jerusalem, where he eventually died. It’s impossible for us to know the truth regarding Matthias’s later

ministry, since the Bible does not give us any information about him after his selection to the Twelve.

Application/Activity

The two apostles we have studied today are the least known of all of the apostles. Does this make their service to Christ any less? Do we need recognition or accolades from any man for the service we do for Christ? We all know who sees every act of service done in the name of Christ. We also know where our reward for such acts lie. This week's application/activity is a homework assignment. I would like for each man to create a list of service acts that can be accomplished within our church and outside of our church. The Bible says that our acts of service will flow from a deep abiding faith in Christ. We have acts of service because of our faith. Without our faith there will be no acts of service. Prayerfully consider how you, and we as a group, can serve others, within and outside of our church. Something on your list may spark someone else's interest in that service. That interest may lead to one more person being converted into the kingdom of God. This is not a waste of time, I promise.

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