



Brothers of Jesus

According to Scripture, Jesus had four brothers: *<<Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him>>* (Mark 6:3). Although none of his brothers seemed to follow Jesus in his earthly ministry, two of them at least did so following his ascension.

James, known as James the Just, became a senior leader in the Jerusalem church, and appeared to be the senior figure at the Jerusalem Council, held sometime in AD48-50, which was attended by other apostles such as Paul and Peter: *<<When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me>>* (Acts 15:13). It was to James that Paul took the offerings of the churches in Achaia, Macedonia and probably Asia: *<<When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present>>* (Acts 21:17-18). James was martyred in AD62, when the high priest Ananus had him stoned for allegedly contravening the law of Moses.

Judas, known as Jude, plays no part in the scriptural account of Jesus' life or the work of the early church but his letter has been accepted as having apostolic authority and of divine inspiration.

Neither James nor Jude attribute themselves as brothers of Jesus but servants or slaves:



The statue is of James the Just in Liege, Belgium

<<James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings>> (James 1:1), and: <<Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance>> (Jude 1-2). The word translated servant is the Greek *doulos*, which means slave or bond servant. Many bible teachers would say that Christians are servants and not slaves, but these two men at least considered it an honour to be called his slave, even though the local community would have seen them as Jesus' younger brothers.

The four men listed as Jesus brothers are all children of Mary and there is nothing to support those who hold on to the idea of Mary's perpetual virginity, with the men being sons of Joseph to a previous wife. In fact, the idea of Mary having children to her husband Joseph is more honouring to God than to have remained a virgin. In any case, Scripture is clear: <<**But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus**>> (Matthew 1:25), implying they had a normal sexual relationship after his birth.

What we do not and cannot know is how exactly the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary. If he made one of her eggs fertile then she is Jesus' biological mother, the men are his half-brothers and he would have imputed sin through Adam, making his successful battle with a sinful nature one of great reality and triumph. If the Holy Spirit planted a perfect foetus within Mary's womb that would make her his surrogate mother and the men would have no biological link to Jesus, although two of them at least would become his brothers: <<**Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother**>> (Mark 3:35).