

Recurring Names

Explanation

In the Judeo-Christian world of the first century, surnames were seldom used except by Romans. In keeping with the customs of the time, reference to individuals in the New Testament is usually made using only their given name or occasionally some other identifying factor such as filiation (who their father was, e.g., James the son of Zebedee) or provenance (place of origin, e.g., Mary of Magdala or Mary Magdalene). Such imprecise references produce a great deal of confusion about the identity of several individuals.

The following three charts differentiate, as much as possible, between the Marys mentioned in the New Testament, as well as the Jameses and the Johns. Among these people are some of the most important figures in early Christianity.

References

- Raymond F. Collins, et al., "Mary," *ABD*, 4:579–82.
- Camille Fronk, "Mary, Mother of Jesus," *EM*, 2:863–64.
- C. Wilfred Griggs, "John the Beloved," *EM*, 2:757–58.
- Loui Novak, "John the Baptist," *EM*, 2:755–57.
- R. Douglas Phillips, "James the Apostle," *EM*, 2:716–17.

The Jameses

NAME	IDENTIFICATION	DESCRIPTION
James	son of Zebedee	With his brother John, and Peter, James belonged to the inner circle of three apostles who were with Christ on the most sacred occasions, such as the raising of Jairus's daughter, the transfiguration, and in Gethsemane. To distinguish him from the other James among the original Twelve Apostles, he is known as "James the Greater." The first of the apostles to be martyred, James was killed by Herod Agrippa in A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2). With Peter and John, James restored the Melchizedek Priesthood to the Prophet Joseph Smith.
James	son of Alphaeus	Sometimes called "James the Less" to distinguish him from his fellow apostle James, son of Zebedee, little is known of this James beyond his inclusion among the Twelve.
James	the brother of the Lord	Son of Mary and Joseph, James was identified by early Christians as "James, the brother of the Lord." Paul mentions him along with Peter and John as one of the three pillars of the early church (Gal 1:19). Jude, author of the epistle of the same name, describes himself as brother of this well-known James. James seems to have been assigned supervision of the church at Jerusalem after the departure of Peter and John. In early Christian tradition he was variously believed to have been an apostle, although he is sometimes called the bishop of Jerusalem. He is the writer of the Epistle of James. His personal goodness earned him the appellation of "James the Just," whose death in A.D. 62 at the hands of the Jewish High Priest Ananus, as Josephus (<i>Ant.</i> 20.9.1) reports, was widely believed to have heralded the disasters which befell Jerusalem in the Jewish revolt that immediately followed.