

The Relatives of Jesus in the Gospels

James “the brother of the Lord” is prominent in the Acts of the Apostles and an Epistle is attributed to Jude - were there others?

The infancy narratives have Joseph as the presumed father of Jesus. Luke 3:23 and John 6:42 name him as Jesus’ father and Mark 6:3 names him as a carpenter. He does not appear in later narratives and the general presumption is that he had died; the argument from silence. Jesus’ mother Mary is unnamed in the gospel narratives but appears many times (Mt12:46....), she also appears in Acts 1:14, so she was known in the early church but without any indication of her role. Luke has a family relationship of Mary with Elizabeth (1:36).

In telling the story of Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth, Mark has the crowd saying “This is the carpenter, surly, the son of Mary, the brother of James, Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?” (6:3f). Seemingly at this time Jesus and Mary were not living in Nazareth but probably at the lakeside. Matthew changes the order of seniority in Mark and names Joseph rather than Joset, a common variation at the time. The sisters are not named but plural indicates at least two. The History of Joseph the Carpenter (2)¹ names them as Assia and Lydia. The names most commonly given are Mary and Salome. A tradition, probably taken from an apocryphal work by Epiphanius, names them as Mary and Salome. The Protoevangelium of James (19:3) names a Salome who is possibly a daughter of Joseph², while the Gospel of Philip names a Mary³. Sophronius of Jerusalem joins an Anna to these two. From the available texts we can be reasonably sure James was the elder followed by Joseph, but whether Jude or Simeon was the junior we have no certainty.

There are three views of the relationships. The Helvidian⁴ view, suspicious of the perpetual virginity of Mary, would have them all as the natural children of Joseph and Mary and seeks to find some clues in Hegesippus. The Greek patristic and eastern Orthodox view coming from Epiphanius has them as children of Joseph by his first marriage. The view from Jerome common in the west would have them all as cousins. On balance the weight of evidence seems to fall with the Epiphanian view of the Orthodox that they were the children of Joseph’s first marriage, which would cast Mary as the second wife, perhaps married to look after the existing brood.

Much of the information is filtered through Epiphanius born in Palestine and a monk there before becoming bishop of Salamis in Cyprus in the Fourth Century. “Able but anti-

¹ See Elliott. J.K., Ed. 1993 *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. p114.

² Cf. *ibid.* also Bauckham. Richard, 1990. *JUDE and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church*. T&T. Clark, Edinburgh. p8.

³ I do not have a Notated text. A translation is available at www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gop.

⁴ Helvidius Priscus in the fourth Century wrote against the perpetual virginity of Mary basing his opinion on Tertullian and Victorinus. Jerome wrote against his view.

intellectualist, of wide but ill-digested learning and intransigent zeal for “correct” doctrine”⁵ In short a belligerent who interfered in other dioceses. In many ways a distasteful character, but who can perhaps be relied upon for the Palestinian tradition. The Gospel of Philip is Valentinian, for Hegesippus we have only fragments and other possible mentioned sources are no longer extant. The variants, conflicts and even contradictions are multiple. What credence can we give them? Much of the extant Apocryphal Christian Literature reads like works of fiction and imagination. It was however pious reading for many early Christians. To have been accepted by so many leads us to suggest that there must have been some historical elements that lead to this acceptance.

Various stories have circulated over time regarding the relatives. There is no evidence that there were relatives amongst the Jesus groupies. These pious women seem to have followed Jesus around and probably financed the travels. Nor is there real evidence that any of the 12 were relatives. One story had James and John the lakeside fishermen as cousins. There is no evidence for this. One Apostle Judas Tomas sometimes referred to as the twin was not Jesus’ twin. The story comes from the East Syrian tradition and the Gospel and Book of Thomas which seems to confuse him with Jude. The Greek word for twin Didymus was sometimes used as a personal name - the Semitic equivalent Tomas was not used as a personal name in New Testament times⁶. Simon Peter is commonly called Peter or Cephas to distinguish him from another apostle Simon. Hebrew names were comparatively few and needed some further identification. Mary of Magdala (from the town near the lake) and Judas Ish Carioth (the man from the town of Carioth) are just two examples.

Mary of Clopas could be his wife or daughter. Clopas, since he was named, must have been a known figure in the early church. Hegesippus refers to him as the brother of Joseph and so Jesus’ uncle and father of Simon who followed James as the leader of the Jerusalem church⁷. There is a Jerusalem tradition that the disciples at Emmaus were husband and wife - Mr & Mrs Clopas. Another version has the two as Clopas and his son Simon.

⁵ Cf. Freeman. Charles, 2009. *AD 381 Heretics, Pagans and the Christian State*. Pimlico. London p131. Quoting J.N.D. Kelly. *Jerome*. London.

⁶ Cf. Bauckham. p32ff.

⁷ Ibid p16.

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