

Kingdom Report

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The Family of Jesus

Here is why I believe apostles James and John were cousins of Jesus. Why the extended family were a real problem in the New Testament Church. Why this matters today.

Some years ago on an overseas trip I happened to stop off in a Borders Bookshop and noticed a book called "**James the Brother of Jesus**". It was a huge 1000 pager dense with historical research footnotes, references etc. I was greatly intrigued. How do you manage to write 1000 pages on the brother of Jesus? And written by a Jewish academic Prof. Robert Eisenman of Oxford and California State U. etc. I bought it. Loved it. The good professor it turned out did not like Paul the apostle, neither the Jewish historian Josephus (but accepted his historical accuracy) but really liked James the brother of Jesus as the authentic follower of Jesus and Paul as a Roman fraud.

Anyway from this I decided to buy some more historical research books to get to grips with 1st Century Palestine and specifically the fascinating historical documents available on the extended family of Jesus i.e. siblings, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins and their descendants. Turned out there was a lot of interesting information.

What this research did for me was to clarify some of the serious problems that Paul faced with the church in Jerusalem with regard to the Judaizer issue among the Gentile church and the effect this had on the persecution that followed. And why we in the evangelical church are still plagued by these issues.

So let's get started with some interesting little tidbits.....like brothers James and John as both apostles and cousins of Jesus and proceed from there.

The gospels reveal to us that Jesus had a large following of women who travelled with Him and His disciples who seemed to take it upon themselves to provide in the daily needs of the travelling group. Lets investigate that further from account of the crucifixion scene:

Mat 27:55 And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him:

Mat 27:56 Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

Mar 15:40 There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome;

Mar 15:41 (Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem.

Both Matthew and Mark identify the women who travelled with Jesus and ministered to his group. We have:

In Matthew's account: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James (also known as James the younger) and Joses; and the unnamed mother of Zebedee's children, that would be the apostles James and John (the sons of Zebedee).

In Mark's account: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less and Joses (identified because they would become two of the 12 apostles) and a woman identified as Salome.

Now we read John's account of the same scene....

Joh 19:25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

Joh 19:26 When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

Joh 19:27 Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

Where in John's account you have 4 women listed: Mary mother of Jesus; then Mary's sister; then another Mary the wife of Cleophas and mother of James the younger and Joses, and finally Mary Magdalene. It is obvious the one person who is unnamed is Mary's sister. John knew who she was because in Matthew's account she is called the mother of Zebedee's children and that would be the mother of James and John. That was Mary's sister which was his mother Salome standing with his aunt Mary. And that is why Jesus turned to John while on the cross and asked him to take care of his mother Mary who was John's aunt.

The references to a Mary the wife of Cleophas is also highly significant. She is the mother of two of the apostles listed here, James the younger and his brother Joses, listed in Acts 1:13 as two of the original 12. Early church fathers writings indicated that this Cleophas was also known as 'Alpheus' who was the brother of Joseph. Which would make these two apostles also cousins to Jesus from His father Joseph's side.

So when you have two mothers with two sons each who are cousins of the coming King of Israel Is it any wonder that Mary's sister Salome would appeal to her nephew and ask Him:

Mat 20:20 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.

Mat 20:21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

What would make her think her nephew was destined to be the King of Israel? Well because teenage girls can talk. When her sister Mary became pregnant before marriage this was a potential family disaster. But Mary told Salome you remember that angel Gabriel that appeared to uncle Zacharias in the temple? Well that same angel Gabriel appeared to me and said:

Luk 1:31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

Luk 1:32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:
Luk 1:33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

And since Mary was married to another direct descendant of David and she had kids by him (James, Jude, Simon, Joseph and at least two sisters), you have a group of royal cousins living close to each other. Nazareth was about a days walk to the Sea of Galilee. Obviously the Nazareth family goes for holiday to aunt Salome and uncle Zebedee by the sea and the cousins grow up together.

Now there is another interesting thing about John and his family. Mark 1:19-20 says:

Mar 1:19 And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets.

Mar 1:20 And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.

Jesus has just come out of His wilderness temptation, he is walking by the sea of Galilee and calls Simon Peter and brother Andrew to leave their nets and follow Him and along with them He sees James and John with their father and their ships and calls them to follow him, but notice this.....they left their father and his hired servants. meaning Zebedee was a prosperous shipping owner with employees.

The fact that John came from a prosperous family and was known in influential circles in Jerusalem is hinted at in his gospel:

Joh 18:15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest.

Joh 18:16 But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.

The disciple that was known to the high Priest was John who gave him immediate audience but Peter had to stand outside until John could bring Peter in after a talk to the High Priest. Obviously the rich family of Zebedee were generous contributors to the Temple coffers. Peter was not.

So not only would Jesus have been friends with James and John since childhood but very possibly the brothers Peter and Andrew would be well known to James and John and probably also good friends in the close-nit fishing village. This was a small community with close ties of family and friends.

I believe this close family and friendship relationship was a serious problem that Jesus had to correct with Peter, James and John. I believe that is why He had to ask Peter Who do you say I am? I believe that is why He took them up the Mount of Transfiguration. They needed to get a serious reality check as to who He really was.

This royal family was known to the people of both Nazareth and Judea.

Mat 12:22 Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

Mat 12:23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?

After the great disappointment of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the people crying out for Jesus as the King of the Jews only to be rejected and crucified all His family and disciples wanted to know: But what happened to the whole sitting on the throne of David and King of Israel vision?

This was even uppermost in their mind of His closest family and disciples after the resurrection and before His ascension to heaven they asked Him:

Act 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

They were committed to a vision where Jesus would come again to restore the kingdom to Israel. So much so that the Jerusalem church committed the leadership of the church to the royal family of Jesus. This is incredible to us living in an era when we naturally assume that the leadership of the church is to be by Apostolic and Prophetic ministry.

Not so in the original Jerusalem church. The early church fathers like Hegissipus (90 AD-180 AD), Eusebius (260 - 340 AD) Origin (185-254 AD) and others confirm that the first Bishop of the Church in Jerusalem was James the brother of Jesus, after James death in 62 AD his cousin Simeon was elected Bishop of the church and after Simeon's death, Jude the brother of Jesus and James was elected Bishop of the church.

This royal family tradition as the leaders of a church that preached the coming again of Jesus as the coming King of Israel who would restore the kingdom to Israel and rule on David's throne was the reason why James addressed his epistle to the 12 tribes of Israel scattered abroad. It was the reason why Paul was fighting the "other gospel" of the Judaizers in all the churches as his letters to Ephesus, Galatia and Rome especially indicate. And tragically of all, and Josephus records this in his history of the war of liberation against Rome, it was this gospel of the coming Messiah that was to liberate Israel and establish a Jewish kingdom that resulted in a million people gathered in the siege of Jerusalem expecting to see the Messiah coming to miraculously deliver them and were massacred in the Great Tribulation of 70 AD..

The Romans realizing the danger of the royal David family as a potential for another insurrection hunted down the surviving members. Hegissipus and Eusebius record how emperor Domitian ordered the execution of any surviving David dynasty. They record how the grandsons of Jesus' brother Jude, their names were Zoker (short for Zachariah) and James were captured and brought before the emperor. They explained to him they were no threat but were mere manual labourers. He asked to see their hands and saw they were rough and calloused and he let them go.

I am writing this shortened history of the family of Jesus, and there is in actual much more fascinating material, only to emphasize a problem we have in the evangelical movement.

Jesus saw this problem coming. He told His disciples that many would go out in His name preaching that He is the Messiah (the coming king of Israel) and would deceive

many. The essence of the "Jesus is the coming Messiah" was that Jesus is coming again and when He does He will be ruling from Jerusalem as the King of a restored national Israel. That is why the family of Jesus were chosen as leaders of the church instead of Apostles and Prophets. Paul knew this was "another gospel" a false gospel. And we are encumbered today 2000 years later in the evangelical church with the same false gospel.

To me the central issue about the coming of the Lord is the revelation of Jesus Christ to the world. Because the revelation of Jesus Christ is the revelation of the Father God. Who God is. If you have seen Jesus you have seen the Father.

If you however think or are under the impression that the Second Coming of Christ is that Jesus must come in bodily form to Jerusalem so He can rule the earth then you are under a major illusion. Jesus is God. He is not James's brother or John's cousin. And He is not the King of the Jews He is the King of all the nations of the earth. He is seated now in heavenly places on His throne all power in heaven and on earth has been given unto him. He is able to do exactly what He wants, where He wants, when He wants on earth or in heaven. He is present everywhere....including Jerusalem.

If you think, no the reason He must be on earth in bodily form is for the people of the earth to be able to see Him and recognize Him and obey Him as God, then you are getting closer but still missing the point:

God is not recognized by what He looks like. If you say you want Jesus to appear at His coming as He looked like in human form when He was born into this earth as a descendant of David, well then we have a problem. The problem is this...1 Samuel 17:42 describes David, the ancestor of Jesus according to the flesh as being a "red head and of a fair countenance." So tell me if Jesus comes back in the flesh and He appears like His human ancestor David as a red headed Caucasian is this how you think God wants to be seen by a multitude of races and cultures for 1000 years?

Do you realize that the vast majority of the church worldwide are Black and Asian and Hispanic? If scripture says

"Wherefore henceforth we know no man after the flesh; yea though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more" (2 Cor. 5:16)

The scripture says clearly, there was a time we knew Christ after the flesh, meaning when He appeared as a man we knew His hair colour or eyes of height etc. But that is past! From now on we do not know Christ after the flesh. Meaning we don't either see Him or recognize Him by His human appearance.

I know this is radical but you must get this right:

Jesus is God! God is Spirit!

No man can see God and live. That is what Yahweh (Jesus) told Moses when Moses asked to see His glory. That is what happened to John when he saw Jesus "as He is", i.e. God...he fell as one dead even though he was in the spirit. It was such a frightening overwhelming sight that he fell as one dead.

Later he wrote his epistle and made this keen observation about seeing Jesus. Before you read it you must understand John. He saw Jesus the man, his cousin. He also saw Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration with the glory of God shining from Him. And then lastly he saw Jesus as He really is.....God. Now this is what he says about seeing Jesus....(1 John 3:2)

‘Beloved now are we the sons of God and does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him in order that we may see him as he is.’

John is describing the coming of the Lord. He is not describing it as I hear from so many preachers, ‘Jesus coming again to rule from Jerusalem’. John makes it clear and plain. We will see Jesus not because He is like us but we will see Jesus because we will be like Him. You cannot see Jesus as He is while in this body. That is why John says it does not yet appear what we will be like but we will be changed. He does not say it is Jesus who will be changed so that we can see Him. It is we who will be changed so that we can see Him.

John knew Jesus in the flesh and John knew Jesus in the Spirit. I expect to see Jesus when He comes because I will be like Him and see Him as He is. But how will the whole world see Jesus? What the world will see is Jesus in us, the hope of Glory

We cannot identify God or Jesus Christ to the world by what Jesus looks like or by what God looks like and the coming of the Lord is not a revelation to help us identify God by our eyes.

God is revealing Himself progressively both to each of us as we walk with Him and He is revealing Himself progressively to all mankind through His Church.

When the Lord reveals His appearance it is always as “the glory of the Lord”. That is why Moses asked to see the glory of the Lord even though scripture says that God spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend....Moses wanted to see God in His glory as He is.

So Yahweh Jesus tell Moses you have found grace in my sight and I am going to reveal myself to you. And what was that revelation? What was the glory of the Lord that Moses saw?

“The Lord, proclaimed His name to Moses, the Lord merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands and forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin....”

This is the glory of God....the character of God. This is who He is. This is how we display the glory of God to the world. Being merciful and gracious and longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth and being merciful and forgiving.

Now here is my added point about the how the whole world will see Jesus. They will see the glory of the Lord because scripture says that the glory of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. How will this happen?

Jesus said (John 17:22)

”And the glory which you gave me I have given unto them”

And this is what Paul says about that glory in us....

2 Cor. 4;7 “this treasure we have in earthen vessels” meaning “Christ in us the hope of glory” (Col. 1;27)

In 2 Cor. 3;18 Paul explains how this glory grows in us to be displayed to the world...

“But we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are bring transformed into the same image from glory to glory”

To what same image are we being changed into? Into the image of Jesus Christ. So that the glory that Jesus had is being imparted to us. Why?

So that the world can see Jesus. That to me is the primary purposes of the coming of the Lord. It is not that the world can see a physical red head Caucasian Jesus sitting in Jerusalem but that the world can see the glory of God in Asian, and Black and Hispanic and Caucasian earthen vessels that will reveal to the world the glory of God...the character of God that will let the world know who God is and what He is like.

That is why the next coming of the Lord is to His New Jerusalem on earth which is the Tabernacle of God on earth which is His Temple which is His Church and that is why He is not coming to old Jerusalem in Palestine as a glorified Caucasian male.