

JAMES THE JUST, BRETHREN OF THE LORD

An article by Heba Hrimat

He is a first rank figure of the apostolic church and the first ever Bishop of Jerusalem, but his identity is sometimes confused with that of Apostle James, son of Alphaeus.

James the Just did not only head the great mother Church of Jerusalem and was an acknowledged Saint whose sanctity and life of prayer and intercession were proverbial, but he was also regarded with warrant by many in the early Church as the font of all episcopacy, presided over the first Church council, authored Scripture, and was as celebrated a martyr as any martyr of his time.

The New Testament mentions James (the Just), either by name or in association with the rest of the Lord's brothers, in distinction from the Apostles. For example, after the resurrection of Jesus, the Lord appeared to James in a separate revelation (1 Cor. 15:7).

James became the leading figure of the Church of Jerusalem and took a strong hand in deciding the matter of requirements for Gentile converts to Christianity, during the Council of Jerusalem "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood..." and he went on to formulate a policy that became the policy for the whole Church (Acts 15:13ff).

Speaking of his early visit to Jerusalem, Paul stated that he received the "right hand of fellowship" from "James, Peter and John" (Acts 21:18); a listing of names in which James is given precedence.

By all accounts, James was an outstanding example of godliness. He was known as 'the Just and Righteous' and was a consecrated ascetic familiar figure in the Temple, whose knees had grown 'hard like a camel's' through his constant intercession for the forgiveness of the people.

James the Just died in 62 AD, after suffering martyrdom for the same reason as our Lord Jesus Christ.

In that year, certain authorities in Jerusalem, perhaps frustrated in their attempts to get at Paul earlier, maneuvered James into a public confrontation about acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. Perhaps hoping he would back away from the Christian confession and thereby neutralize some of James' strong Christian influence on the people, they were frustrated by his bold confession, which had an effect on a number of the people gathered there. They tried to make the best of the situation and cried out, "Oh, oh, even the just one has erred." At this point some men threw Saint James down from a parapet of the Temple, and seeing that the fall had not killed him, a crowd stoned him. According to the counts of Eusebius of Caesarea (a historian of Christianity).

James continues to be revered in the Church of Jerusalem till this day. A special liturgy headed by His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III is held each 5 November to celebrate the righteous' great legacy and unmatched teachings, inside the beautiful church designated for him, adjacent of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.