

## The Story of the Life of Christ – Lesson 11

### 26 AD

In Lesson 10 we studied the first part of John 1. In those verses John the Apostle first described Jesus as the Word of God made flesh and expanded on the ramifications of that fact. He then went on to start his history of the life of Christ. He began with his eyewitness account of John the Baptist's description of his own mission as he gave it to the delegation of priests and Levites from Jerusalem. There he confessed that he wasn't the Messiah or Elijah or "the prophet" that had been spoken of by Moses. He did proclaim that he was "the voice" prophesied by Isaiah when Isaiah wrote: "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" Since John had baptized Jesus a little more than 40 days before this, he was also able to testify to the Jewish leadership that the Messiah was walking among them. He had seen Him. We can take up John's history in John 1:28.

**John 1:28** **These things were done in Bethabara <sup>1</sup> beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.**  
**KJV**

The "these things" refers to John the Baptist's address to the delegation from Jerusalem. The name of the place Bethabara hasn't survived in the archaeological records. However, we do know that the place John was baptizing was beyond (on the east side of) the Jordan. It was a place John could baptize so it was probably at one of the streams flowing into the Jordan from the highlands on the eastern side of the Jordan. We do know that it was within a three days walk from Cana of Galilee. A three day walk was a distance of about sixty miles. I believe that "Bethabara beyond Jordan" was at the junction of the Jordan River with the Jabbok River, which was 25 miles south of the Sea of Galilee. See location 1 (red triangle) on the map on page 6.

**John 1:29** **The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"**

As we already noted in the last lesson, this was the occasion of His return to the Jordan River road after the 40 days of testing in the wilderness. That time of temptation probably ended at the true Mt. Sinai in Arabia. We know that John had addressed the delegation from Jerusalem the prior day at Bethabara, so the wording does not preclude the probability that, after John had spoken to them, he had started north up the Jordan. This would raise the possibility that the encounter described here took place a day's walk north of Bethabara. We know that Jesus covered the distance between the encounter described in this verse and Cana, near Nazareth in just two days. The distance between Bethabara and Cana (68 miles as the crow flies) can be covered in two days, but it is a hard walk. However, if John had left Bethabara the previous day, that would have allowed three days for the journey which would be no big problem for people

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<sup>1</sup> As we saw at the end of Lesson 10, in some manuscripts the name Bethany appears instead of Bethabara.

who walked everywhere. John the Baptist was likely in his annual process of relocating near to Aenon on the west side of the Jordan near Beth-Shan. Pilgrims headed for Jerusalem would more likely take that route on the west side of the Jordan for the upcoming feasts that occurred during the rainy season.<sup>2</sup> The pilgrimage route east of the Jordan where Bethabara was located was impractical at that time of the year because the early rains made the Lower Jordan unfordable. We have scriptural evidence for this because we know that John was located at Aenon during the rainy season of 27 AD (John 3:23). This verse described John the Baptist's first sight of Jesus since the day when he had baptized Him probably about two months before. This was the day after he had told the delegation that the Messiah walked among them.

**John 1:30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'**

Here John the Baptist referred to the statement he had often made during his ministry about the coming Messiah:

Matthew 3:11 "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry."

Mark 1:7 "And this was his (*John's*) message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie."

Luke 3:16 "John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

**John 1:31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."**

Although John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin, this reveals that until Jesus showed up at the Jordan River to meet him, John the Baptist did not know who He was. Remember, as we studied earlier, Joseph and Mary had been absent in Egypt for from as little as two years to as much as nine years before they returned. Perhaps, by that time, John the Baptist's elderly parents had passed away. Possibly the need for Jesus' anonymity in His youth had precluded contacting them. John's mother Elizabeth was from Mary's family and, as we shall see, Mary's family had been scattered by the Romans' war against the Zealot rebellion around Nazareth just after Jesus had been taken to Egypt.

**John 1:32 Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him."**<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Those feasts were the Feast of Dedication in December and Passover in March.*

<sup>3</sup> *As prophesied in Isaiah 11:2.*

John the Baptist had baptized Jesus on the Day of Atonement at the Fords of the Jordan. This verse makes clear that everybody but John (“I saw”) must have gone to Jerusalem for the Feast and John must have been alone by the Jordan when Jesus came to him and the Heavens opened up. Beyond that manifestation of the Spirit, the Father had also said, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Jesus had then left and travelled down into the great desert where He had been tested for 40 days. After the angels ministered to Him and He had recovered, He had travelled back toward the Jordan and Galilee. It was on that trip that Jesus next encountered John the Baptist. At that time John had left Bethabara and was probably about a half day’s walk beyond. Here we will see that it was only John the Baptist who identified Jesus as the one who had been marked out by such miracles. However, he had undoubtedly spoken of Jesus and the miracles he had witnessed many times to his disciples in the days that had followed.

**John 1:33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’**

Besides the voice from heaven, evidently the Father had previously revealed by vision or dream the information that the visible presence of the Holy Spirit would mark out the Christ who was the Son of God.

**John 1:34 I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”**

As he said these things He must have been pointing at the approaching Jesus. However, the scripture does not say that Jesus stopped and talked with John or with his disciples. He seems to have just walked on by. Remember, this was on the road north. I must surmise that John and his disciples had stopped to eat when Jesus walked by and camped out of sight somewhere down the road. I believe that this happened at the map location I have marked with a number 2. Evidently, after Jesus had walked out of sight, John and his disciples finished what they were doing and started north down the road again. Before they camped for the night, they unwittingly must have passed Jesus camped just off the road.

**John 1:35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples.**

In the morning, John and at least two of his disciples had risen early and were down by the road again. At that time an earlier arising Jesus walked by them yet again. Again, He did it without saying a word. I believe that this happened at the map location I have marked with a number 3. After the second encounter without acknowledgment by Jesus, John must have sadly begun to understand that his ministry must be separate from Jesus’ ministry. This was probably when John the Baptist first “cried out”:

John 1:15b “He cried out, saying, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”

We are told that John was there with at least two of his disciples. We know he had more. Perhaps the rest aren't mentioned since they don't play a part in the rest of the story. Perhaps John had sent the rest ahead to Aenon to prepare a place for his ministry of baptizing and preaching to pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem.

**John 1:36** **When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!”<sup>4</sup>**

This was the third testimony that John's disciples had heard him make within a matter of twelve hours.

**John 1:37** **When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.**

We know that one of the disciples was John, the son of Zebedee and the brother of James. He was the writer of this account. The other disciple was Andrew, the brother of Peter. They weren't there by chance, but by God's appointment. We must assume that after John the Baptist's remarkable proclamation the previous day that they had discussed its implications during the night. When they saw Jesus the next morning they wasted no time before following after Him.

**John 1:38a** **Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?”**

This is an interesting comment. It seems to indicate that Jesus hadn't been previously informed by the Father who His first two disciples would be. In His incarnation Jesus had laid aside the exercise of the omniscience of His deity.

**John 1:38b** **They said, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?”**

However, the response of the two indicated they were there to be taught. Jesus knew He was there to teach.

**John 1:39a** **“Come,” he replied, “and you will see.” So, they went and saw where he was staying and spent that day with him.**

We know from the later narrative (verse 41-43) that the place he was staying was not in Galilee, but within a day's walk of Cana. It is marked on the map with the number 4. Everything indicates it was near the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This doesn't seem to refer to a camp, but at least to a semi-permanent residence of some sort where he kept some belongings. Remember, he was just returning to this place after about a two month's absence in the desert. There is much that is left to the imagination, but it seems quite possible that Jesus had first

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<sup>4</sup> *The words in John 1:15 were “cried out.” The words here in John 1:36 were only “said” not “cried out,” but the words were slightly different (in both the English and the Greek).*

retired to this location for a time of communion with the Father, isolation, fasting, and prayer. Then He had journeyed south for His eternal appointment with John the Baptist at the Jordan. There, on the Day of Atonement, He began his three-and-a-half-year ministry which would culminate with His death. During those years to come, He would hardly have a normal waking moment to Himself.

**John 1:39b-40** **It was about the tenth hour (two hours before sundown). Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John (the Baptist) had said and who had followed Jesus.**

We know that Andrew and Simon Peter lived in Capernaum <sup>5</sup> although they were originally from Bethsaida. Capernaum was 15 miles by road from where Jesus was staying near the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee east of the Jordan in the province of Decapolis. The question has to be raised how Andrew could have found Peter and returned with him the thirty miles from Capernaum and back in the two hours before sundown. The answer is that Peter wasn't at Capernaum, but with the fishing fleet. That time of year, Peter and the rest of the fisherman would have been fishing near the southern end of the Sea of Galilee where it discharged into the southern Jordan River, where the water was warmer, and the fish congregated that time of the year. Nathanael and Philip were also both fishermen and would also have been where the good fishing was. It was probably late November by this time and the southern side of the lake would have been much warmer as the northern side was fed by melting snow from Mt. Hermon. The fish in the Sea of Galilee preferred warmer water.

**John 1:41** **The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We (Andrew and John) have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).**

There were two main factors in the confidence of their testimony. First, they trusted John the Baptist's testimony of how the Father had revealed to him that Jesus was His son. Second, they had spent nearly a day speaking with Jesus.<sup>6</sup> This was probably, also the main ingredient of their testimony to Philip and Nathanael the next day. That and the fact that they had spent a night and a day with Him and found that He was a man like no other man they had ever met!

**John 1:42** **And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).**

The name "Cephas" is a Greek spelling (Κηφᾶς) of an Aramaic word which means "stone." Peter (Πέτρος - Petros) is the Greek word meaning "stone."<sup>7</sup>

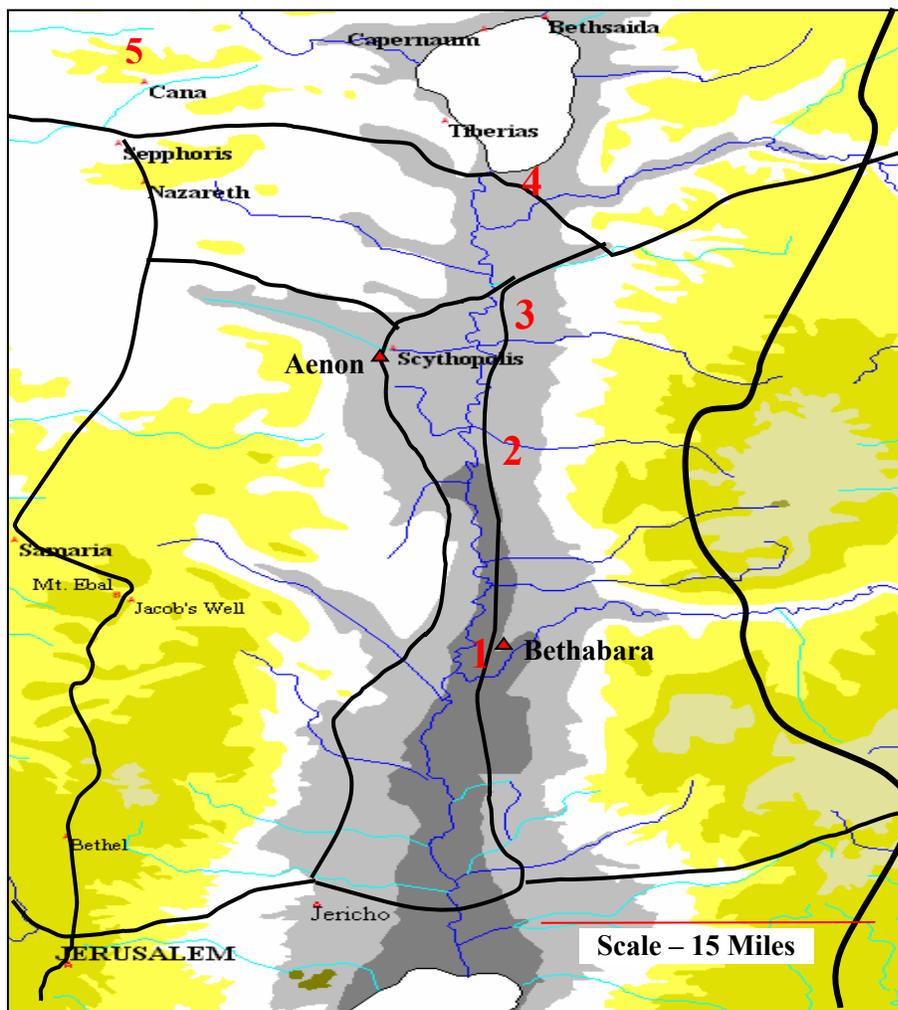
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<sup>5</sup> Luke 4:31-38

<sup>6</sup> Although it is not mentioned here, we also have evidence that the mother of John Apostle was the lost sister of Mary. When he realized who Jesus was, he might have remembered the stories about Mary's miraculous pregnancy.

John 1:43 **The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “*Follow me.*”**

Phillip is a Greek name and means “lover of horses.” This verse tells us that Jesus was not at that moment in Galilee. That means He must have been just east of the Jordan in the Decapolis as I have previously stated. The phrase “finding Philip” is interesting. It could also be translated “meeting Philip.” It stimulates the question of how many of Andrew’s and John’s fisherman friends were told the amazing tidings about the Messiah and brought to Jesus. Almost certainly John told his brother James, but John never mentioned himself or his brother in his Gospel. I suspect they told more than just Peter and James. The only other two who followed Jesus were Steven and Nathanael.



*Map of John's and Jesus' Journey Up the Jordan*

John 1:44 **Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida.**

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<sup>7</sup> *It is interesting that the name of one of the great human enemies of Jesus was “Caiaphas” which many think is related to the word Cephas and also means “rock” or “hollow rock.”*

Bethsaida, which means “house of fishing” is at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, just about three miles east of Capernaum. Phillip was obviously also a fisherman who had come south with the fishing fleet.

**John 1:45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”**

Nathanael was called by two names. The other name was Bartholomew. He became one of the twelve disciples. “Nathanael” was Hebrew meaning “gift of God.” Bartholomew was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. The name Bartholomew is an Aramaic patronymic which means “son of Tolomai.”

**John 1:46 “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip.**

In Israel in that day there were four major parties. There were the Sadducees, who controlled the money and political power. There were the Pharisees, who dominated the beliefs of the Jews. There were the Essenes, who were ascetics that disavowed wealth and power. Finally, there were the Zealots. They were revolutionaries who wanted to overthrow the Romans and the whole system. The Zealots had been a force in Israel since Herod the Great was a young man over sixty years before. Herod had defeated them decisively and made that success the steppingstone to favor with the Romans and his eventual rulership over the Jews. However, although the Zealot’s military power was destroyed, their ability to attract malcontents to their view of things did not cease. In 4 BC, just after the time of the appearance of the star, and the birth of Jesus, Judas of Galilee, a descendant of the original chief of the Zealots rose up in Galilee and declared himself the Messiah. He led the people of Sepphoris in a bloody revolution which was only put down after the Romans came and captured the city and the region around it. They then killed or deported the entire population. Judas died, but his sons and followers were still a powerful voice of dissent and fanaticism. In 70 AD, in one of the final acts of early Jewish history, the Zealots were largely responsible for the suicidal defense of Jerusalem and starvation and murder of over a million Jews. Their center of influence was always in the area around Sepphoris. Nazareth, which was only 4 miles away, was in the heart of this area. In Jesus’ day, Sepphoris itself had been rebuilt as a Roman colony, and settled with people loyal to the Romans, but the surrounding countryside was rife with Zealots. Thus, when Nathanael heard the name “Nazareth” he naturally identified it with the erroneous ideas of the Zealots and their history of following false Messiahs like Judas of Galilee. He wondered if anything good could originate in that region. Although the zealots were enemies of the Romans, they were almost equally enemies of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who they felt had traitorously compromised with the Romans.

**John 1:47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.”**

Since we know that Jesus did not have omniscience, the Father must have imparted this information to Jesus. We will see this happen from time to time in the life of Christ. The LORD had also done this from time to time with prophets like Samuel and Elisha. The comment “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false” just means that Nathanael was a pursuer of God’s truth and it was that, not his bloodline which made him a true Israelite.

**John 1:48 “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”**

Evidently, at the time the Father had given the information about Nathanael, He had given Jesus a vision of Nathanael seeking God while resting under a fig tree, probably after a hard day’s fishing.

**John 1:49 Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”**

We don’t know what Nathanael’s experience or revelation had been while under the fig tree, but it must have been extraordinary. Consider that his declaration was a full acknowledgement of who Jesus Christ was. It took most of the disciples three more years to be prepared to make that declaration of faith.

**John 1:50 Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.”**

Jesus Himself was a little taken aback by Nathanael’s declaration of faith. Some would see Him raise the dead and still not believe.

**John 1:51 He then added, “I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”<sup>8</sup>**

This looked forward three and a half years to the ascension of Christ to heaven. That would be the final proof of what Nathanael had just declared on such comparatively small evidence. Nathanael would be present on that day.

**John 2:1a On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee.**

It is worth noting that Cana is about 4 miles north of Nazareth, and that according to John 21:2, Nathanael was from there originally. Jesus must have proceeded there directly from the place He was staying on the south side of the Sea of Galilee, east of the Jordan. It was about 17 miles as the crow flies.

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<sup>8</sup> See Genesis 28:11-14 and “the angels ascending and descending.”

**John 2:1b-2 Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.**

These verses challenge us to answer some questions.

The first question is, "How did Jesus know about the wedding?" One possibility is that He might have known about it even before He went south to be baptized by John the Baptist. Another possibility is that He might have been sent a letter which He found at the place He had been staying. Also, the Father might have just revealed it to Him.

The second thing we must assume is that Jesus invited those early disciples to accompany Him. The ones listed here were five, John, Andrew, Peter, Phillip and Nathanael. At that point, they had to leave their boats in the custody of other members of their crew. We know that each boat could hold at least thirteen people, so the normal crew must have been at least five or six. Now in this account, we only have John present by implication. He never mentioned his own name in his gospel. His brother James was also a fisherman, so we can assume he was also present at the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee. John also never mentioned his brother James' name. Considering that James and John became two of the three disciples closest to Jesus I think we can assume that James was also included with the other five who began to follow Jesus at this time.

The third thing we must assume is that the disciples were invited to the wedding only after they arrived at Cana with Jesus. Cana is located with the number 5 on the map.

At this point in our study, we begin to bump into one of the things about which most Christians that I know seem to be ignorant. That is, the familial relationships of Jesus to some of the others in the Gospel story. Some of these relationships have been tied up in great controversy, and others are hardly mentioned at all. For example, few know that James and John were the first cousins of Jesus. Also, there is a big argument with the Catholic Church over whether or not Mary had any other children. Therefore, at this point I think it would be useful to include a thorough study of the relatives of Jesus in the Bible.

## The Relatives of Jesus Christ

### *James & John were the 1st Cousins of Jesus*

Part of my conclusions about the relationship of Jesus to the brothers James and John are based on an analysis of three Gospel lists of women who were watching the crucifixion. The three lists are found in Matthew 27:56, John 19:25, and Mark 15:40.

John 19:25 “Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas,<sup>9</sup> and Mary Magdalene.”

Matthew 27:55-56 “Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.”

Mark 15:40 “Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.”

Below you will find a table which organizes these facts:

### *The Women at the Cross*

<u>List of Women</u>	<u>First Woman Listed</u>	<u>Second Woman Listed</u>	<u>Third Woman Listed</u>	<u>Fourth Woman Listed</u>
<b>John 19:25</b>	His mother	His mother’s sister	Mary the wife of Clopas	Mary Magdalene
<b>Matthew 27:56</b>	Mary Magdalene	Mary mother of James and Joses	mother of Zebedee’s sons	
<b>Mark 15:40</b>	Mary Magdalene	Mary mother of James and Joses	Salome	

It is clear that Mary Magdalene was in every list, so it was almost certainly the same group. However, our insights and our problems come in the identification of the other members. I also should comment that it makes perfect sense that John in his Gospel would list his Aunt Mary and his own mother before he listed Mary Magdalene. They would have been first in his mind as he remembered the scene. Matthew and Mark listed Mary Magdalene first. The fact that a prostitute, who had been demon possessed, was standing at the foot of the Cross, the Holiest spot in the world, seems to have struck them most strongly.

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<sup>9</sup> The name Clopas is equivalent to Cleopas. A Clopas is mentioned in Luke 24:18 as one of the disciples who the Lord talked to after his resurrection on the road to Emmaus.

1. Some have taken the phrase “his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas” in John 19:25 to be referring to one person. This would mean that Mary had a sister also named Mary which is unlikely. I think we can conclude that the term “his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas” is talking about two women. The first was his mother’s sister, who we find from the other lists was named Salome and was the wife of Zebedee. The second was Mary, the wife of Clopas.
2. Some have concluded that that Mary, the mother of James and Joses in the Matthew and Mark lists wasn’t Mary the mother of Jesus, but Mary the wife of Clopas who they conclude must have had two sons named James and Joses (Joseph). Yet we know from John that Jesus’ mother was at the foot of the cross at the beginning. These critics have contended that Mary, the mother of Jesus, had then fled the scene with John. They contend that the Mary listed in the Matthew and Mark lists was the Mary who was the wife of Clopas. They contend this in spite of the fact that we know that the Mary who was the mother of Jesus had two sons, James and Joses (Joseph) who were prominent in the early church. On the other hand, there is no mention anywhere else in scripture of a James or a Joseph who were the sons of Clopas although some have tried to evade that fact (see paragraph 3 following). Paul spoke of the “Lord’s brother” James as being one of the top two of three leaders in Jerusalem. I will have more to say later about Joses (Joseph) who is mentioned in Acts 1:21-26.
3. Some have asserted that Clopas and Alphaeus are actually the same name. That allows them to assert that James the son of Alphaeus, who was one of the twelve disciples, could also be the son of Mary, the wife of Clopas. Therefore they can say that, since Mary wife of Clopas was the mother of James the son Alphaeus, then if she was the mother of a son named James, she could also be the Mary who was the mother of a James and Joses in the second two lists. Actually this idea that the name Clopas was equivalent to Alphaeus is a pure fabrication on the part of the Roman Catholic Church. It was part of their attempt to defend their false doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. I will go into that further later. Ironically, in the process of promulgating this doctrine, they accused Mary of leaving her Son as he died. They further imply that, since she wasn’t the Mary who was the mother of James and Joses, after she fled from the scene of the crucifixion she also wasn’t at the tomb when He was buried and she wasn’t at the tomb when He, was resurrected. The Mary at the tomb when Jesus was buried and resurrected was described by Matthew both times as “the other Mary” (Matthew 27:61, 28:1). Since in Matthew’s list the only other Mary was Mary, the mother of James and Joses, he had to have meant her. Mark described the Mary at Jesus’ burial as “Mary the mother of Joses” (Mark 15:47. He described the Mary at the resurrection of Jesus as “Mary the mother of James” (Mark 16:1). Luke described the Mary at the tomb at Jesus’ resurrection as “Mary the mother of James.” So, in the process of trying to make Mary sinless and perpetually a virgin, they actually demeaned her as having lost her faith. They say she not only fled the cross and the burial, but that she was so upset that she didn’t even return with the women on Sunday morning to anoint His body. Either that, or they could say that she was just overlooked in the lists of Matthew and Mark. Who do you think would be left out of two of the lists? The Lord’s mother, or Mary the wife of Clopas who is in John’s list? To me, the answer is obvious, so I was puzzled when I discovered there was a

lot of support for Mary the wife of Clopas in church history. I finally figured out why. There is some support in Church tradition that Clopas was the brother of Joseph.<sup>10</sup> That would have made any son of Clopas the first cousin of Jesus on His father's side. If this account from the early second century AD is true, then this would arguably make this woman, Mary's sister-in-law.<sup>11</sup> However, Eusebius, the source of the tradition tipped me off as to the reason for accepting Mary of Clopas as the second member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> lists. Eusebius was an early subscriber to the Ever Virgin Mary doctrine of the Catholic Church. The Catholics have proposed for years that Clopas is equivalent to Alphaeus. I've read that commentary many times, even in Protestant books, and wondered how Alphaeus was equivalent to Clopas. There is never any explanation as there is with so many other transmutations of names.<sup>12</sup> Why? Because if Alphaeus is equivalent to Clopas then James the son of Alphaeus (one of the twelve disciples) was James the son of Clopas. If James the son of Alphaeus was the equivalent of James the son of Clopas, then he would be the Lord's first cousin and the argument could be made that he was the James who was the Lord's brother mentioned in Galatians 1:19), and the Catholic Church's argument that James is the cousin or "relative" of Jesus, not his real brother gains weight. Since they have long argued, against the rules of Greek grammar, to say that brother and relative mean the same thing, they can say "See James was just his relative, therefore, relative is the same as brother!" Of course even if Clopas was the brother of Jesus' father Joseph, it does not make Alphaeus equivalent to Clopas. The following passages also help make the point that the second Mary in the second two lists must have been the mother of Jesus. Otherwise, it means Mary forsook her son at the cross, and never even went to his tomb!

4. This is the full account from John: John 19:25-27 "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."
5. This is the full account from Mark: Mark 15:40-41 "Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of

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<sup>10</sup> Reference *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, The Cross and the Crown, Chapter 15, Edersheim* "What we have every reason to regard as a trustworthy account (Hegesippus in Eusebius. H.E. 3:11 and 4:22) describes Clopas as the brother of Joseph, the husband of the Virgin." If this account from the early second century AD is true, then this would make this woman Mary's sister-in-law.

<sup>11</sup> Arguably, because the words translated "Mary the wife of Clopas" are literally "Mary of Clopas" so she could have been the mother, wife, or daughter of Clopas. She would thus have been a presumptive Grandmother, Aunt or 1st Cousin of Jesus. I use the term "presumptive" because Jesus' paternal line came from God and not from Joseph.

<sup>12</sup> The reasoning of the advocates of this view seems to be that they need James the son of Alphaeus to be the son of Clopas, so they need Alphaeus to be a Greek form of Clopas. They base their idea on nothing more than that. It gives them a rationale to defend their false doctrine of the ever-Virgin Mary which is defeated on so many other Biblical fronts.

Joses, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.”

6. This is the full account from Matthew: Matthew 27:55-57 “Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.”

In addition to the scene at the foot of the cross, some of those women were marked out later at Jesus’ burial and resurrection:

Mark 15:46-47 “So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.”

Matthew 27:58-61 “As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.”

Mark 16:1-3 “When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, ‘Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?’”

Conclusion: the second Mary in the Matthew and Mark lists is Mary the Lord’s mother who was also the mother of James and Joses (Joseph).

Also, Jude is recorded in scripture as the brother of James, and extra-biblical history (History of the Christian Church, Philip Schaff, Chapter 2) records that James had another brother named Simon who was Bishop of Jerusalem in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. This means that the James listed here as the son of this Mary had three other brothers named Joseph (Joses), Jude (Judas), and Simon. Scripture says that Jesus had four brothers who were named James, Joseph, Jude and Simon:

Matthew 13:55 “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?”

Mark 6:3 “Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon?”

Acts 1:14 “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

I think that is enough circumstantial proof to convince anybody.

The third woman in each of the lists is described differently in each list. This is really no problem, and it gives us an insight into the relationship of Jesus to James and John. The third woman is described as the sister of Mary, the wife of Zebedee, and her name was Salome. She is one and the same woman. As the wife of Zebedee, she was the mother of James and John, the disciples of Jesus, the “sons of thunder” as the following verses attest:

Matthew 4:21 “Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets.”

Mark 3:17 “James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder).”

If the mother of James and John was the aunt of Jesus it would have made John the closest male relative at the cross where Jesus, the eldest son of Mary was dying, and would explain the following request by the Lord to John:

John 19:25-27 “Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.”

If the mother of James and John was the aunt of Jesus it would help explain her tremendous presumption in approaching Christ for a special favor for her sons.

Matthew 20:20-21 “Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. ‘What is it you want?’ he asked. She said, ‘Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.’”

If John was a relative of Jesus it would explain why John and his brother James could walk two days from the Jordan and be invited to the wedding at Cana. It would also help explain why Mary and Jesus’ brothers would immediately go down to Capernaum after the wedding where John’s mother Salome, Mary’s long-lost sister lived:

John 2:1-12 On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.” “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” **(Better translated “Dear lady, what is that to you and Me.” RST)** Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Nearby stood six

stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples.

I called Salome, the mother of James and John, Mary's "long lost sister." Why? Remember, John didn't know who Jesus was when he first met him? How could they be first cousins, and this be so? This is my answer: -- Just after the departure of Joseph, Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape the slaughter of the babies in Bethlehem, being just after the census that brought Joseph to Bethlehem, an insurrection broke out in the precincts of Sepphoris in Galilee. It happens that Nazareth was located just four miles from Sepphoris. These are some of the pertinent passages from Josephus.

**Antiquities of the Jews, by Flavius Josephus, Book 17, Chapter 10 Verse 5.** There was also **Judas**, the son of that Ezekias who had been head of the robbers, which Ezekias was a very strong man and had with great difficulty been caught by Herod. This **Judas**, having gotten together a multitude of men of a profligate character about **Sepphoris in Galilee**, made an assault upon the palace [there,] and seized upon all the weapons that were laid up in it, and with them armed every one of those that were with him, and carried away what money was left there; and he became terrible to all men, by tearing and rending those that came near him; and all this in order to raise himself, and out of an ambitious desire of the royal dignity; and he hoped to obtain that as the reward not of his virtuous skill in war, but of his extravagance in doing injuries.

**Wars of the Jews, by Flavius Josephus, Book 2, Chapter 4, Verse 1b.** At this time there were great disturbances in the country, and that in many places; and the opportunity that now offered itself induced a great many to set up for kings. And indeed in Idumea two thousand of Herod's veteran soldiers got together, and armed and fought against those of the king's party; against whom Achiabus, the king's first cousin, fought, and that out of some of the places that were the most strongly fortified; but so as to avoid a direct conflict with them in the plains. In **Sepphoris** also, a city of **Galilee**, there was one **Judas** (the son of that arch-robber Hezekias, who formerly overran the country, and had been subdued by king Herod); this man got no small multitude together, and brake open the place where the royal armor was laid up, and armed those about him, and attacked those that were so earnest to gain the dominion.

**Antiquities of the Jews, by Flavius Josephus, Book 17, Chapter 10 Verse 9.** As soon as Varus was once informed of the state of Judea by Sabinus' writing to him, he was afraid for the

legion he had left there; so he took the two other legions, (for there were three legions in all belonging to Syria,) and four troops of horsemen, with the several auxiliary forces which either the kings or certain of the tetrarchs afforded him, and made what haste he could to assist those that were then besieged in Judea. He also gave order that all that were sent out for this expedition, should make haste to Ptolemais. The citizens of Berytus also gave him fifteen hundred auxiliaries as he passed through their city. Aretas also, the king of Arabia Petrea, out of his hatred to Herod, and in order to purchase the favor of the Romans, sent him no small assistance, besides their footmen and horsemen; and when he had now collected all his forces together, he committed part of them to his son, and to a friend of his, and sent them upon an expedition into Galilee, which lies in the neighborhood of Ptolemais; who made an attack upon the enemy, and put them to flight, and took **Sepphoris, and made its inhabitants slaves, and burnt the city.**

Here is the relevant passage from the Bible:

Acts 5:34-37 “But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed them: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.”

These passages help lead us to the conclusion that there were severe disturbances that plagued Galilee, and particularly the regions around Nazareth, in the years just after Herod's death. I suspect that these things caused Joseph and Mary to stay in Egypt several years. This, together with the fact that the people around Nazareth became either captives, rebels, or war refugees, helps explain why Mary's relatives (i.e. John the Baptist and Mary's sister, the mother of John and James.) seemed to have lost touch with her and her family after last hearing of the attempt on their lives in Bethlehem by Herod's soldiers. Since they heard nothing, they probably concluded that they had perished in the slaughter. When Jesus came with James and John to the wedding at Cana, I believe it was the first time that Mary had learned of Salome's fate or location. That also explains why after the contact with James and John, Mary took her whole family to Capernaum (John 2:12) where Salome and her family lived for a family reunion. This sort of losing track is not unusual. Even in our century, with its improved communication, there were families who had not tracked each other down thirty years after the war in Korea. It is happening now with the mass dislocations in the Middle East.

Another support of the relationship of John and James to Jesus is found in the writings of Eusebius. Eusebius, writing in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, had before him the manuscript of Papias. Papias, who was taught by Polycarp a friend of John the Apostle, stated that both James and John were sons of an aunt of Jesus. Papias wrote in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Unfortunately, we

no longer have the manuscript of Papias on which Eusebius relied. We only have Eusebius' account of it.

## **James, Joseph, Jude & Simon are the Brothers of Jesus**

One of the great controversies in the Church from the fourth century was the worship of Mary. It has no basis in scripture, and the motivations for promulgating it are beyond my understanding. However, as part of this doctrine, its proponents advocated the view that Mary was sinless<sup>13</sup> and therefore always a virgin.<sup>14</sup> Such a doctrine could not countenance the teaching that Jesus had brothers who were natural sons of Mary. The advocates of this doctrine thus were obliged to ignore the fact that Jesus had half-brothers and that it is clearly taught all over Scripture as seen below:

Acts 1:14 “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” (ἀδελφός {ä-del-fo's})<sup>15</sup>

Matthew 13:54-56 “Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?’ they asked. ‘Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers (ἀδελφός {ä-del-fo's}) James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?’”

Mark 6:3 “‘Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother (ἀδελφός {ä-del-fo's}) of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at him.”

Mathew 12:46-50 “While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers (ἀδελφός) stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, ‘Your mother and brothers (ἀδελφός) are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’ He replied to him, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ (ἀδελφός) Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. (ἀδελφός) For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’”

Mark 3:31-35 “Then Jesus’ mother and brothers (ἀδελφός) arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, ‘Your mother and

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<sup>13</sup> This view included their teaching of the “immaculate conception” of Mary which contends that she was somehow born without sin.

<sup>14</sup> The Bible never says that having sex is a sin. In fact, in the proper circumstance, it was a command: Genesis 9:7 “As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”

<sup>15</sup> Some claim that when the Bible speaks of brothers here it means kinsmen or relatives. The word for that is (συγγενής {sün-ge-nā's}) which is used in Luke 2:44 and Luke 1:36.

brothers (ἀδελφός) are outside looking for you.’ ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ (ἀδελφός) he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! (ἀδελφός) Whoever does God’s will is my brother (ἀδελφός) and sister and mother.’”

Luke 8:19-21 “Now Jesus’ mother and brothers (ἀδελφός) came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, ‘Your mother and brothers (ἀδελφός) are standing outside, wanting to see you.’ He replied, ‘My mother and brothers (ἀδελφός) are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.’”

John 7:2-10 “But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus’ brothers (ἀδελφός) said to him, ‘You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.’ For even his own brothers (ἀδελφός) did not believe in him.<sup>16</sup> Therefore Jesus told them, ‘The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come.’ Having said this, he stayed in Galilee. However, after his brothers (ἀδελφός) had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret.”

Acts 1:14 “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (ἀδελφός).”

Galatians 1:18-19 “Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles--only James, the Lord’s brother.” (ἀδελφός)

1 Corinthians 9:5 “Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers (ἀδελφός) and Cephas?”

James 1:1 “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.”

Jude 1:1 “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother (ἀδελφός) of James, to those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ:”

The Roman Catholic Church has raised an objection against James, Joseph, Judas and Simon being Jesus’ brothers as a defense of their doctrine that Mary was the ever-Virgin Mary, the

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<sup>16</sup> *The attitude of his brothers was prophesied in **Psalms 69:8-9** “I am a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother’s sons; for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.”*

Immaculate Mother of God. Although there was no basis, biblical, apostolic, or post-apostolic, to support this doctrine, in the fourth century AD, documents began to appear which taught it. They subsequently raised two attacks on the teaching that the brothers mentioned in the Bible were the natural sons of Mary. The first, promulgated about the fourth or fifth centuries was to insist that these brothers were the sons of Joseph through a prior marriage. The problem with that was that this put the brothers and sisters into an entire generation earlier than Jesus and that did not square with the Biblical accounts or tradition. So, the second sprang up. This was first suggested by Jerome and is the one held today by the Roman Catholic Church. Their view holds that the word “brothers” could as well mean “kindred” or “cousins.” There is no basis in the original Greek for that suggestion. The Greek συγγενής {sün-ge-nā's} is the word that means “cousin” or “kindred” and the Greek ἀδελφός {ä-del-fo's} is the word that means “brother.” However, the Catholic Church has obstinately stood by their view ever since. However, they also have another problem from scripture, and it is the following passage:

Matthew 1:24-25 “When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”

If the Bible had meant to teach the perpetual virginity of Mary, it certainly would not have included the phrase “he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son.” It would have just said “he had no union with her.”

### **Additional information on the brothers of Jesus**

The following passages could refer to Joseph and Jude the brothers of Jesus.

Acts 1:20-26 “‘For,’ said Peter, ‘it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ and, ‘May another take his place of leadership.’ Therefore, it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.’ So they proposed two men: *Joseph called Barsabbas* (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, ‘Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.’ Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.”

Acts 15:22 “Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose *Judas (called Barsabbas)* and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers.”

We know that the relatives of Jesus never mentioned their family connection and downplayed it. Witness the fact that James never mentioned it in his epistle, and neither did Jude. An example of this humility of family connections is demonstrated in the fact that John the apostle

never even mentions his brother James in his Gospel. In Acts, Luke never mentions Titus, although many believe Luke was his brother. In the case of the Judas in Acts 15, Barsabbas means “son of peace.” Also, the book of Acts never mentions that James the leader of the Jerusalem church was the Lord’s brother. We depend on Paul (Galatians 1:18-19) to tell us that fact. It is possible they took this name to evade any attempt to glorify them because of their family. It is certain that Jesus’ brother Jude was prominent in the Church. After all, he wrote a book of the Bible! The Jude mentioned in the passage above was sent as an envoy of the Jerusalem church to the Antioch church with the expectation that he would carry some weight. Who better than the Lord’s brother? If Judas Barsabbas was the Lord’s youngest brother, it is certainly likely that Joseph Barsabbas was his oldest brother. In several passages only Joseph and James were mentioned at all! It would have been most likely that he would have been picked as a replacement for Judas Iscariot, who had known the Lord longer than any of the disciples.

According to Philip Schaff in his History of the Christian Church, Chapter 2) Simon the brother of James was supposed to have been the Bishop of Jerusalem at the end of his long life. He was martyred in 107 AD. Thus, it seems that we know something about every one of the Lord’s brothers; James, Joseph, Jude, and Simon. They were all prominent in the Church.

According to 1 Corinthians 9:5 listed above the Lord’s brothers were married and went out as apostles.

### **Mary was the Mother of Jesus and Joseph was her Husband.**

It is clear from the genealogies in Matthew and Luke that Mary was the mother of Jesus and Joseph was her husband. The genealogies make a point of omitting a flat statement that Joseph was not Jesus’ father, although they imply that he was not. It is other passages that make clear that God was the Father of Jesus. The Matthew genealogy connects only Mary to Jesus by blood. He is connected to Joseph by law.

Matthew 1:15-16 “Eliud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.”

The Luke genealogy says Jesus was thought to be the son of Joseph, but was in fact the son (descendant, in this case grandson) of Heli, the father of Mary. We have to suppose this is the line of Mary because we already know the line of Joseph from Matthew.

Luke 3:23-24 “Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph.”

We know Jesus’ father was God from the following passages.

Matthew 1:19-21 “Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’”

Luke 1:28-35 “The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.’ ‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’ The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.’”

### **Jesus had other relatives than His Mother and Father**

**It is clear that Jesus had other relatives, probably in Nazareth, based on the following passage:**

Luke 2:43-44 “After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives (συγγενής {sün-ge-nā's}) and friends.

Tradition seems to indicate that Jesus’ relatives in Nazareth were from Joseph’s side of the family. Evidently, Mary’s side of the family had been irretrievably scattered or killed in the aftermath of the insurrection by Judas the Galilean.

### **John the Baptist was the 1<sup>st</sup> Cousin once removed or 2<sup>nd</sup> Cousin of Jesus**

**It is clear that Jesus is a cousin of John the Baptist on Mary’s mother’s side based on these verses:**

Luke 1:5 “In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.”

Luke 1:24-27 “After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. ‘The Lord has done this for me,’ she said. ‘In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.’ In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to

Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.”

Luke 1:36-41 ““Even Elizabeth your relative (*συγγενής* which can mean “cousin” or “aunt”) is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.’ ‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May it be to me as you have said.’ Then the angel left her. At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

These three verses have made it clear that Elizabeth, John’s mother, was a descendant of Aaron. We know from the genealogies in Luke and Matthew, that Joseph was a descendant of Judah, and Mary’s father was also. It is therefore clear that the connection of Mary to Elizabeth must have been on Mary’s mother’s side. Mary’s mother must have been the one descended from Aaron. Considering the age difference between Mary and Elizabeth it is likely that she was Mary’s aunt. Unfortunately, the same word, *συγγενής* {sün-ge-nā's}, was used to designate cousin or aunt.

It is also clear from the verse below that whatever John the Baptist may have heard about his cousin from his parents, he never met Jesus in person. It is possible that John’s parents died before Mary, Joseph and Jesus returned from Egypt.

John 1:31 “I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”