

## The Jesus Five

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This is a study of the circle around Jesus. That circle consisted of the five persons individually called by him in Mark. I find that the Jesus Five have their successors in a later Five known to the Jewish establishment at Jerusalem, a memory of which is preserved in Rabbinic tradition, and that the Twelve are a second, posthumous stage in the organizational development of the Jesus movement.

### The Jesus Five

The Five are individually summoned by Jesus. Here is the earliest account:

- **Mk 1:16.** And passing along by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea, for they were fishers. [17] And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. [18] And going on a little further, he saw Jacob the [son] of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending the nets. [20] And straightway he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after him.

- **Mk 2:14.** And as he passed by, he saw Levi of Alphaeus sitting at the place of toll, and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

Four of these (though Andrew, only minimally) figure in the rest of Mark.

### Levi

Levi is distinctive in several ways. (1) He is called later than the others. (2) He is the only one of the Five not called along with a brother, though “Jacob of Alphaeus” on the Twelve list would appear to be a brother of “Levi of Alphaeus.” (3) He is an official and not a fisherman-entrepreneur. (4) He never reappears in Mark. This last point would follow if, with his administrative experience,<sup>1</sup> he became the movement’s resident manager in Capernaum, and therefore did not accompany the Historical Jesus on his preaching tours to the villages of Galilee. Further, (5) Levi is the only one of the original Five who does not make the transition to the later Twelve group; his place there is filled by Matthew. The usual view is that Levi and Matthew are one person, but there is also some evidence which suggests, to the contrary, that Levi died early and was replaced by an unrelated person named Matthew.

<sup>1</sup>Galilee exported salted fish through the port of Acco (Edwards **Socio-Economic** 60-62). The other four, who were commercial fishermen, may thus have known Levi in his professional capacity. If so, then all the original Five were mutually acquainted before Jesus called them. This previous situation may lie behind the very brief Markan narrative of their calling.

How early did Levi die? The Apostolic literature contains no tradition of Levi as a missionary, but he does appear at two places. One is in the Gospel of Peter, where he is among the few who first saw the risen Jesus in Galilee:

[59] But we, the twelve disciples of the Lord, wept and mourned and each one, grieving for what had happened, returned to his own home. [60] But I, Simon Peter, and my brother Andrew, took our nets and went to the sea. And there was with us Levi, the son of Alphaeus, whom the Lord . . .<sup>2</sup>

The manuscript breaks off here. In John 21, an analogous story continues with the fishing party – Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the Zebedees, and two unnamed persons, thus leaving room for Andrew and Levi – seeing the risen Jesus on the shore. Omitting Nathanael (an invention of the Gospel of John) and Thomas (who has a special place in that Gospel), the boat party consists of Peter and Andrew, the Zebedees, and Levi: *precisely the original Galilee Five*. In the [Gnostic] Gospel of Mary [Magdalene], Levi opposes Andrew and Peter in defending Mary’s account of teachings concerning the ascent of the soul, which she claims to have had from Jesus; this evidently takes place soon after Jesus’ death. From these appearances of Levi we get the impression that later tradition did view him as surviving Jesus’ death, though not for long.

How did Levi come to be changed to Matthew? One possibility is that at his death he was replaced by someone of that name. Acts 1:15-26 narrates the replacement of *Judas* by Matthias, thus bringing the Eleven back to full strength.<sup>3</sup> This is contradicted by 1 Cor 15:6, which mentions the appearance of Jesus to the Twelve, not to Eleven. I suggest that the Acts story has as its basis the replacement of *Levi* by Matthias.<sup>4</sup> This view would reconcile the Jesus tradition as it was known to the writer of 1 Cor 15 (and early elements of the Gospel of Peter) with the Twelve tradition as it appears in Mark.

### The Rabbinic Five

In the Rabbinic literature (b.Sanhedrin 43a), five disciples of Jesus are condemned to death by puns on their names. Klausner **Jesus** 28-30 interprets the names thus:

Mattai = Matthew (following Krauss)  
 Naqai = Luke (following Krauss)  
 Netser = Nozrim (Christians; so Krauss) or Andrai = Andrew (so Klausner)  
 Buni = Nicodemus (so many) or Yuhanni = John Zebedee (so Klausner)  
 Todah = Thaddaeus

“Luke” is conceivable.<sup>5</sup> But I believe Klausner is on firmer ground in interpreting Buni as John Zebedee, and in rejecting Krauss’s generic “Nozrim” reading of Netser.

<sup>2</sup>Elliott 158.

<sup>3</sup>For the argument that Judas was not one of the Twelve, see Brooks **Twelve**.

<sup>4</sup>“Matthew” and “Matthias” are variant versions of one Hebrew name. “Matthias” occurs in the Acts of Andrew and Matthias (Elliott 283f), the Acts of Peter and Andrew (Elliott 299f), the Book of the Resurrection (Elliott 672), and the Gospel of Matthias (Elliott 19f).

<sup>5</sup>In the Apostolic literature, Evangelists *do* sometimes appear among the Twelve. The Greek version of the Assumption of the Virgin includes, among those gathered for the death of Mary, John Zebedee (the narrator) and Luke.

Further improvements may be possible. Hirschberg has suggested the following:<sup>6</sup>

- Mattai = Matthew
- Naqai = [Simon] the Zealot (by transposition of letters within Hebrew)<sup>7</sup>
- Netser = Andrew (following Klausner)
- Buni = Boanerges = John Zebedee (agreeing with Klausner for other reasons)
- Today = Thaddaeus

This brings the Rabbinic Five within the Markan Twelve, and I will take it as correct.

What does it suggest? Since only one Zebedee is present, and Andrew but not Peter, it suggests the situation in Jerusalem after Herod Agrippa I had killed Jacob Zebedee, and Peter, escaping from prison, had fled the city (Ac 12:1-17). If Herod's persecution was directed at the Jesus leadership in Jerusalem, then the Rabbinic Five might be the Most Wanted list after the execution of Jacob and the escape of Peter.

And when was that? Herod Agrippa I reigned from 41 to 44.<sup>8</sup> In Acts, Agrippa's death follows his killing of Jacob (Ac 12:20-23),<sup>9</sup> and we may not unreasonably date the execution of Jacob to 44.

This is supported by the evidence of Paul. The purpose of Paul's Jerusalem visit (Gal 2:1-2) was to verify the validity of his message, including his position on the food rules, which if enforced would have prevented commensality between Jewish and Gentile Christians.<sup>10</sup> As Paul tells it, the Jerusalem leaders "Jacob, Peter, and John" gave him "the right hand of fellowship" (Gal 2:9), implying acceptance of his position. Later, some "from Jacob" came to Antioch and reprovved this laxity; Peter, who had previously eaten with Gentiles, was shamed into reversing himself. This angered Paul (Gal 2:11-14), and it may puzzle modern readers. Why the reversal?

Beare proposes<sup>11</sup> that the "Jacob" who approved Paul's practice was Jacob Zebedee, whereas the one who later disapproved it Jacob the Lord's Brother, who had meanwhile become the leading figure at Jerusalem. Then between Paul's visit to Jerusalem and the sending of hostile agents to Antioch, Jacob Zebedee had died, and the Lord's Brother had become the Jerusalem leader.

<sup>6</sup>Hirschberg **Simon** 180f.

<sup>7</sup>According to Josephus War 2:651 and 4:160f, the specific name Zealot was first used at the time of the Jewish War. Mark and Matthew call Simon a Cananaean, altered by Luke B (writing after 70; see Brooks **Acts-Luke**) to Zealot. Rabbinic tradition also uses the later term. But such movements go back to Judas the Galilaeen, under the procurator Coponius (6-9 AD; Josephus War 2:118). The change of term obscures a continuity of type.

<sup>8</sup>Having aided the rise of Claudius to the Emperorship after the January 41 assassination of Caligula, Agrippa was rewarded with the addition of Judaea and Samaria to his previous domain (Josephus Ant 19:274).

<sup>9</sup>The death, though not the execution, is reported in Josephus (Ant 19:343-350). Compare Ant 18:116, where the death of an earlier Herod is linked to his execution of John the Baptist.

<sup>10</sup>Paul in Galatians (written after the event and recalling an earlier encounter) mixes in the question of circumcision. But the outcome at Antioch in Galatians, as well as the story in Acts, along with the rule against "idol meat" in Didache 6:3, all suggest that commensality, and thus food rules, was the issue at that time. Common meals were central to early Christian fellowship.

<sup>11</sup>Beare **Sequence**.

Also plausible is Beare's answer to the unasked question: Why the persecution, and why only of "some" (Ac 12:1)? His answer is that the persecution was inspired by the Jewish hierarchy, who objected to the Jerusalem Decision of the Christian leadership which had threatened a basic tenet of Judaism by voiding the traditional food laws.<sup>12</sup>

Then Paul visited Jerusalem while Jacob Zebedee was alive, at latest in early 44. This visit has been a stone of stumbling for the Paul chronographers. Paul's own dating is "the 14th year" (Gal 2:1), probably the 14th year from his conversion, which as he tells us (Gal 1:15-16), was brought about by a vision of Jesus. Paul was jealous of his Apostolic credentials, which consisted solely of that vision, and it would be like him (or his editors, if they it was) to date it to the year of Peter's vision (1 Cor 15:8), which most likely occurred in the year of Jesus' death. If Paul is counting exclusively, and the visit, as here supposed, was in early 44, then the year of Jesus' death will have been the often mentioned 30. I will use this date for present purposes.<sup>13</sup>

The rise of Jesus' brother Jacob (a conservative, who survived at Jerusalem until his own death in 62)<sup>14</sup> to the Christian leadership at Jerusalem need not have occurred immediately. If the order of mention of the Rabbinic Five is meaningful, then it was Matthias who first succeeded to the leading position. The sequence would be:

- 43 Jacob Zebedee is the leading figure at Jerusalem
- 44 Paul visits Jerusalem; Jacob Zebedee, Peter, and John Zebedee approve him
- 44 Jacob Zebedee is killed; Peter is driven from Jerusalem
- 44 Matthias (a liberal) briefly succeeds to Jesus movement leadership in Jerusalem
- ?? Matthias too finds it prudent to leave Jerusalem; he preaches in Ethiopia
- ?? Jacob, the Lord's conservative Brother, comes to power in Jerusalem

This will explain why Jacob [Zebedee] is mentioned first by Paul, and was executed first by Agrippa: he was at that time the chief figure among the Jerusalem Christians.<sup>15</sup>

All this agrees well with Acts, where Peter works *from* Jerusalem, but is not the highest authority *in* Jerusalem. If Paul's order of mention is significant, Peter ranked after Jacob Zebedee, but ahead of John Zebedee, among the top three. Then the Galilee Three who are narratively predominant in Mark were also those whom Paul bitingly calls "the very chiefest Apostles" (2 Cor 11:5) at Jerusalem.

<sup>12</sup>Beare **Sequence** 305f; further developed in Beare **Notes**.

<sup>13</sup>A visit in 43 is possible, which would allow either 30 (counting inclusively) or 29 as the year of Jesus' death; the latter solves the Quartodeciman controversy. How, or whether (note the plural "revelations" in 12:7) this vision is to be equated with the one "fourteen years ago" in 2 Cor 12:1-6 is left for a future exercise. If the two are the same, then (with Knox **Pauline**) the Corinthian ministry must have begun earlier than is usually thought.

<sup>14</sup>According to Josephus Ant 20:204, in the interim between one Roman governor and the next, Jacob was condemned by the Sanhedrin for "transgressions against the law" and stoned. This passage, like the one on Jesus in Ant 18:63-64, may be a Christian interpolation. Even so, it may preserve a Christian tradition about the date of Jacob's death.

<sup>15</sup>The inference that Jacob Zebedee became the chief authority at Jerusalem explains the Mk 10:35-40 request of Jacob and John to occupy positions of power in the future Kingdom. This passage in Mark, which alludes to Jacob's death, must have been written *after* his death.

## From Jerusalem

I conclude that the original Five, with Matthew replacing Levi, remained the inner authority group at Jerusalem, among whom the Galilee Three (Peter and the Zebedees) continued to have a special prominence; Paul's contacts were limited to those three. After the persecution under Herod Agrippa I, Matthew, Andrew, and John Zebedee remained; the other two were replaced by Simon Zelotes and Thaddaeus. Accepting leadership at such a time requires nerve. Simon's epithet Zelotes implies sympathy with the Zealot cause, and thus some personal courage.<sup>16</sup>

Paul's evidence is that the Jerusalem leadership soon passed from the liberal Five to Jacob, the Lord's conservative Brother. That the Lord's Brother was acceptable to the Jewish Establishment in Jerusalem is implied by the fact that he remained the chief figure until his death in 62. One tradition is that he was succeeded at Jerusalem by two more "Lord's brothers," first Simon and then Judas.<sup>17</sup>

A tradition associated with Peter points to a general exodus of the Twelve from Jerusalem "after twelve years."<sup>18</sup> If the administrative shift to Jerusalem occurred in the year 33, or 3 years after Jesus' death, the Agrippa year 44 would be the 12th. There are signs that not only members of the Twelve, but other liberal Jerusalem Christians, specifically Mark, departed for other places in that year or shortly afterward.

**Mark** is said in Acts 12:25 to have gone to Antioch with Barnabas and Saul (Paul) directly after the persecution of Agrippa. In support of the claim that Mark sought a wider horizon at this time is the tradition of the Alexandrian church, which is that Mark came to Alexandria in 48, and remained until his death in 68.<sup>19</sup>

**Matthew.** The Apostolic literature soon descends to tales of magic and monsters; martyrdom is the usual ending; the theme of sexual continence (encratism) is common.

<sup>16</sup>So also the alternate rendering "Simon the Cananaean" (see Taylor **Mark** 234a). For the term Zealot, and its antecedents of similar type, see n7 above.

<sup>17</sup>The Epistle of "Jude" (Judas), probably late 1c, claims to be written by Judas the brother of Jacob, which is evidence that the family succession was accepted at that time; it also supports the attribution of the Epistle of Jacob to Jacob the Brother. That Epistle was more likely written by Jacob of Alphaeus, one of the Twelve, and one of the few likely to have had a competent Greek education; see Brooks **Jacob**. The claim of the author of "Judas" attests the early reascription of the Epistle, and thus the standing of the Lord's Brother in the late 1c.

<sup>18</sup>The earliest reference to such a period is that of Clement of Alexandria (*Stromateis* 6/5, late 2c), "On this account, Peter says that the Lord said to the apostles, . . . After twelve years go forth into the world . . ." Eusebius 5/18:14 (early 4c), "Moreover, [Apollonius] says, as though from tradition, that the Saviour ordered his apostles not to leave Jerusalem for twelve years." The twelve-year interval is taken as a familiar fact in the Acts of Peter 2:5 (late 2c; Elliott 401f), "While they were grieving and fasting God was already preparing Peter at Jerusalem for the future. After the twelve years had passed, according to the direction of the Lord to Peter, Christ showed to him the following vision . . ."

<sup>19</sup>Variants put his arrival as late as 61 (Atiya 26-27), probably to accommodate the tradition that Mark interpreted for Peter at Rome. But Mark had known Peter already in Jerusalem. His association with Rome rests solely on comments in the deuteroPauline literature, which in part is concerned to exalt Rome as the center of all that is important in Christian preaching, and also what is chronologically first in the written tradition (Mark).

Probably late, therefore, are the Acts of Andrew and Matthias,<sup>20</sup> in which Andrew rescues Matthias from a city of cannibals. If from the more plausible Acts of Matthew we subtract the martyrdom<sup>21</sup> and the conversion of Princess Ephigenia to chastity,<sup>22</sup> what remains is the idea of preaching in Ethiopia, which is perhaps emblemized by the fantastical Acts tale (Ac 8:26-40) in which Philip, directed by Heaven to the Gaza Road, converts a eunuch, the steward of the Ethiopian Queen Candace.<sup>23</sup> The eunuch then resumes his journey, becoming himself the bearer of the Gospel to Ethiopia.<sup>24</sup>

**Simon Zelotes** figures in the Arabic Infancy Gospel, as a child bitten by a snake but healed by Jesus.<sup>25</sup> A Latin Martyrology assigns Simon (with Judas)<sup>26</sup> a mission to Babylon and Parthia, at the time when the other Apostles went to their assigned fields, suggesting a common beginning after the Agrippa persecution.

**Thaddaeus** is said to have preached in Edessa and (with Bartholomew) Armenia. Edessa tradition is that Thaddaeus (Syrian “Addai”) was sent there after Jesus’ death, as promised in correspondence between King Abgar and Jesus, and died in Edessa after naming a successor.<sup>27</sup> The Armenians give 43-66 as Thaddaeus’ years in Armenia,<sup>28</sup> which would better agree with a scattering of Apostles after 44. This later date for Thaddaeus’ years in Syria would merely put Thaddaeus’ visit toward the end, rather than the beginning, of the reign of Abgar the Black (30-50).

Peter we have already considered. The accounts of Andrew and John Zebedee<sup>29</sup> center around Greece and Ephesus, respectively, but do not suggest a particular year.

The Jesus message reached Alexandria<sup>30</sup> and Rome,<sup>31</sup> to mention no nearer places, very early. But there may be a factual mid-40’s core to the “from Jerusalem” concept.

<sup>20</sup>Though we may note its linking of two of the final Jerusalem Five: Matthew and Andrew. Did Andrew achieve importance only after the departure of his energetic brother Peter?

<sup>21</sup>Heracleon (Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis 4/9) says that Matthew was not martyred.

<sup>22</sup>Clement (Stromateis 3/4): “[Gnostics] say that Matthias also taught thus: that we should fight with the flesh and abuse it, not yielding to it at all for licentious pleasure” (Jacob 13).

<sup>23</sup>He appears in the Acts of Matthew as the eunuch Candacis, Matthew’s host in Ethiopia.

<sup>24</sup>Is this intentional? The cattiness of Luke toward the other Evangelists (he shows Mark as an ineffective missionary in Ac 13:13b, 15:37-39) has been little noted in the literature.

<sup>25</sup>Elliott 103.

<sup>26</sup>Simon Zelotes and Judas of Jacob early became confused with Simon and Judas, the younger brothers of Jesus, who tradition says succeeded Jacob the Lord’s Brother at Jerusalem. The author of the Epistle of Judas (“Jude”) already identifies himself as “the brother of Jacob.”

<sup>27</sup>The correspondence between King Abgar and Jesus is quoted by Eusebius 1/13:1-10, supposedly from the originals preserved in the Edessa archives.

<sup>28</sup>See Atiya **History** 315f.

<sup>29</sup>Elliott 231-283 and 303-338, respectively.

<sup>30</sup>Apollos of Alexandria is theologically re-instructed by Priscilla and Aquila in Ac 18:24-28.

<sup>31</sup>The expulsion of “Jews” from Rome, including Priscilla and Aquila, implying large numbers of converts to “Chrestus” and thus an earlier establishment, took place in 49.

### Historical Implications

Mark, the less schematized parts of Acts, Paul's testimony, and the less fantastic of the Apostolic and local traditions, together suggest this real-time scenario:

1. The original Five (the Galilee disciples Peter and Andrew, the Zebedees, and Levi of Alphaeus, mentioned individually in Mark) were the inner circle in Jesus' lifetime. Levi (perhaps assisted by Andrew) was the manager at the Capernaum headquarters, and did not take part in Jesus' preaching tours.
2. Shortly after Jesus' death, Levi died, and was replaced for administrative purposes by Matthias/Matthew. This is the event garbled in Acts 1.
3. As the Word spread, a group of Twelve were recognized as authoritative interpreters. The leadership circle remained at Five, now including Matthew. (Levi's brother, Jacob of Alphaeus, replaced him as Capernaum manager, and was added to the Twelve list also). This is the Twelve layer in Mark.
4. In Jerusalem, besides the Five, Jacob the Lord's Brother was also present, and exerted influence due to his special relation to Jesus. This was the situation when Paul (as he recalls in Galatians 1) visited Jerusalem in 43 or early 44.
5. Later in 44, enraged by the Five's permissive ruling on allowable foods, the Temple Establishment (acting through Agrippa) moved against the Five, killing Jacob Zebedee; Peter barely escaped. This is the event behind Acts 12.
6. The Five were reconstituted from their three surviving members plus two of the wider Twelve circle: Simon the Zealot and Thaddaeus. That Leadership Five are the ones referred to in the contorted death list of Sanhedrin 43a.
7. Not long after, the Five and most of the Twelve left Jerusalem, and Jacob the Lord's conservative Brother became the chief figure. Abrogating the earlier agreement, Jacob required Gentile converts to conform to Jewish customs. This is the Judaizing wave "from Jacob," which Paul angrily recalls in Galatians 1. It appeased the Jewish Establishment; Jacob lasted at Jerusalem for 15 years.

Then the Jerusalem leadership may have ended in dispersal in 44 and 45. A remnant, in direct succession to Levi, continued to direct the widely scattered Alpha Christian churches from the old center in Capernaum.<sup>32</sup>

I believe that this will account for the actual history of the Twelve, lying behind the superficially inconsistent traditions in the canonical and noncanonical literature. That the Twelve were constituted after the death of Jesus, as an administrative development from the old Five group, is implied by the fact that, as was already seen by Eduard Meyer, the passages in Mark mentioning them are *exiguous* in Mark.<sup>33</sup> They represent a development not included in the original Markan narrative, but added at a later time, in order to keep Mark's Gospel current with contemporary arrangements.

<sup>32</sup>For the authorship and audience of the Epistle of Jacob, which for both linguistic and theological reasons the Lord's Brother could not have written, see Brooks **Jacob**. For its later reattribution, see n18 above.

<sup>33</sup>Meyer **Ursprung** 1a/264-291. His "Twelve source" has not found general favor with later investigators. For another interpretation of the data, which sees the Twelve passages as a set of interpolations (and thus *later* than the basic narrative) and not a source (and thus *earlier* than the basic narrative), see Brooks **Twelve**, the companion piece to the present study.

## Appendix: The Gospel of Matthew

Commentaries on Matthew tend to find the authorship of that Gospel uncertain. The present suggestions may permit a different view of the evidence usually relied on.

- Would an Apostle have based his work on the earlier work of a non-Apostle? Matthew, who replaced Levi after Jesus' death, was not a companion of Jesus, and might plausibly have based himself on Mark's then standard work.
- Eusebius 3/39:16 reports Matthew as "compiling the logia<sup>34</sup> of Jesus in Hebrew." Matthew is conspicuous among the Gospels for its reliance on OT prophecy as fulfilled in Jesus. Ten Scriptural allusions, marked by a special idiom, are sometimes closer to the Hebrew than to the Greek Septuagint.<sup>35</sup> Eusebius' informant may have had in mind this feature of Matthew's Gospel.
- Rabbinic tradition implies that, after the killing of Jacob Zebedee in 44, Matthew was the leading figure in the reconstituted Jerusalem Leadership Five. He might then have later (c68)<sup>36</sup> taken in hand the task of reworking Mark from a more Scriptural angle, adding pious legends of his own time, in one of which (the birth story), true to his time in Africa, and echoing the OT story of the Exile in Egypt, he included a scene in which the Holy Family flee to Egypt.

We may then cautiously credit the tradition of Matthew's authorship of the Gospel, given this sense of who Matthew was, and what his relation to Mark may have been.

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<sup>34</sup>λόγια "oracles," not "sayings," which would be λόγοι.

<sup>35</sup>See for example Allen **Matthew** lxi. The passages in question are Mt 1:22f, 2:6, 2:15, 2:17, 2:23, 4:14, 8:17, 12:17, 13:35, 21:4. A typical version of the formula is "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through [Isaiah] the prophet . . ." (Mt 8:17, 12:17, 13:35).

<sup>36</sup>For the pre-70 dating of Matthew, see Gundry **Matthew** 599-609 or Gundry **Date**.