

Epistle of Ya'akov (Ya'akov) ~ An Introduction

So, Who Is this Ya'akov?

That is an excellent question. Men named **Ya'akov** can be found throughout the **Tanakh** and the **Brit Hadashah**. **Ya'akov** has been translated as both **Jacob** and **Ya'akov**. **Ya'akov** was a prevalent name in biblical times as it is today.

There are four mentioned in the **Brit Hadashah**:

- **Ya'akov**, the brother of **Yochanan** and son of **Zebedee**, disciples of **Yeshua** (Mark 1:19; 3:17; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13).
- **Ya'akov**, the son of **Alphaeus** and also one of the Twelve (Mark 3:18; 15:40; Matt 10:3; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).
- **Ya'akov**, the father of **Y'hudah** (Judas) (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13).
- **Ya'akov**, the brother of **Yeshua** and head elder of the **Yerushalayim** kehillah (Mark 6:3; Matt 13:55; Acts 15:13).
- The final option is a pseudonymous (falsely ascribed) letter written under the name of **Yeshua's** brother but penned by an unknown author. ¹

It is generally agreed that the second and third options are too obscure (they do not take part by name in any action in the Gospels or Acts). Pseudonymity, the fifth option, is a widespread view among critical scholars. However, this line of argument has been overturned in recent years as studies have shown the widespread use of Greek in Palestine and the high quality of many writings.

That leaves two options to choose from: the brother of **Yochanan** and one of the inner circle of the **Twelve** (with **Kefa** and **Yochanan**); or the brother of **Yeshua**, chief elder of the **Yerushalayim** kehillah. The problem with the first is that he was martyred by **Herod** quite early, about 43–44 CE (see Acts 12), just a bit too early for the writing of this letter. Moreover, **Ya'akov**, the brother of **Yeshua**, has been the person associated with this letter from the very start and fits perfectly.

Ya'akov was none other than a blood-brother, a half-brother, of the Lord **Yeshua HaMashiach**. The Gospels mention this fact (see Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). He was at first an unbeliever - ***His brothers spoke this way because they had not put their trust in him.*** (John 7:5) However, during the forty days between **Yeshua's** resurrection and His ascension, **Yeshua was seen by Ya'akov, then by all the emissaries.** (1 Corinthians 15:7) **Ya'akov** is mentioned as being in the upper room in **Yerushalayim**, praying with his mother and the rest of the disciples (Acts 1:13), and was presumably present when the **Ruach HaKodesh** descended at **Shavu'ot** (Pentecost). He had become the leader of the **Yerushalayim** church when **Kefa** was released from prison (Acts 12:17), and eventually, he chaired the **Council of Yerushalayim** (Acts 15:13ff.; 21:18; Galatians 1:19; 2:9, 12).

Ya'akov was a "late bloomer," but he flowered well! **Ya'akov** knew **Yeshua** as only a few could. For years he had eaten at the same table, shared the same house, played in the same places, and watched the development of his amazing older brother. And when he indeed came to *know Yeshua*, his boyhood privilege was not wasted, for he became known as **Ya'akov the Just**, a man of immense piety. The historian **Eusebius** records the testimony of Hegisippus that **Ya'akov** *"used to enter alone into the temple and be found kneeling and praying for forgiveness for the people so that his knees grew hard like a camel because of his constant worship of God kneeling and asking forgiveness for the people. So, from his excessive righteousness, he was called the Just."*²

¹ Osborne, G. R. (2019). **James: Verse by Verse** (p. 2). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

² Ibid.

Ya'akov had so much going for him, yet merely viewed himself as *a slave of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah*. He could have begun his letter, **Ya'akov the Just**, from the sacred womb of Myriam, congenital sibling of **Yeshua**, his brother, a confidant of the **Messiah**." **Ya'akov** the Just was also **Ya'akov** the Humble and so was eminently qualified to author Holy Scripture.

We will learn a little more about **Ya'akov** as we dig into the first two verses in my next post.