

and that John, who alone uses the name Clopas, never mentions Alpheus—it seems very reasonable to adopt the conclusion that the last evangelist means the same person as the former.” Assuming this reasoning to be well founded, the second question must be answered in the affirmative,—that is to say, James the son of Alpheus and James the less, son of Mary and Clopas, were identical. But why does Mark call him “James the less”? In the original Greek the term is *o micros*—which ought to be translated “the little.” The comparative term, “the less,” originated in the Latin Vulgate, where the rendering is *Jacobus minor*. The only reasonable explanation for the use of this diminutive adjective is that James the son of Alpheus was probably a little man, and that he is so called to distinguish him from James the son of Zebedee who may have been a taller man. As we shall see presently, it could not be applied to him with propriety in the sense of implying any mental inferiority. Even in our own times it is not uncommon to resort to such distinctive epithets as “big John” and “little John” in families or clans where the same name is of frequent occurrence. The third question is the most difficult to answer satisfactorily. There can be no doubt that James, the son of Alpheus, was the same as the person called “James the Lord’s brother,” since Mary the wife of Clopas, is named in the passages just cited as the mother of James and Josas, and these are called by both Matthew and Mark the brethren of Jesus. But when we come to enquire if James was a full brother of our Lord, in the usual acceptance of the word, we enter upon debatable ground. This subject has been keenly discussed by commentators and has not been settled to this day. The statements of Matthew and Mark, taken by themselves, seem to decide the relationship, but it must be remembered that the words “brother” and “brethren” are often used in Scripture to mean merely near relatives. Lot was Abraham’s nephew, Gen. 11:27, 31; and 14:12; yet he is called his brother in Gen. 13:8; and 14:14, 16; and Jacob was Laban’s nephew, Gen. 28:2; though Laban calls him his brother, Gen. 29:15. If we are right in believing that Mary Clopas was this James’ mother, he could not be the brother of Jesus in the ordinary meaning of the word.

The nature of the relationship was far more likely that of cousin, whether by the father’s side or the mother’s is doubtful. John, in ch. 19:25, apparently calls Mary Clopas “sister” of Mary the mother of Jesus, but as it is not likely that there were two Marys in the same family, it is quite in accordance with the use of the term “sister” (as in the case of “brother”) to consider the mother of James as only a near relative—the sister-in-law, or the cousin of the mother of our Lord. If the apostle James had been the Lord’s full brother, Jesus would scarcely, while hanging on the cross, have commended his mother to the care of John—who “took her to his own home”—as if she were destitute of any nearer natural protector.

“All the opinions on these points are fully given and discussed by Michaelis, in his introduction to the epistle of James. He states five different suppositions which have been advanced respecting the relationship borne to Jesus by those who are in the New Testament called his brothers;—(1) That they were the sons of Joseph by a former wife. (2) That they were the sons of Joseph, by Mary the mother of Jesus. (3) That they were the sons of Joseph by the widow of a brother, to whom he was obliged to raise up children according to the laws of Moses. (4) That this deceased brother was Alpheus. (5) That they were brothers of Christ, not in the strict sense of the word, but in that of cousin or relation in general, agreeably to the usage of the word in the Hebrew language. This last opinion, first advanced by Jerome, has been very generally received since his time.”\*

The conclusion to which we have thus been brought is that James the less was the son of Mary and Clopas—*alias* Alpheus—that he was a near relative of Jesus Christ, one of the twelve apostles, and the writer of the epistle that bears his name. He must be classed with “the brethren” who, during the earlier part of our Lord’s ministry, “did not believe in him,” John 7:5. It seems from Mark 3:21, that our Lord’s relations generally were of the same opinion as many of the Jews who derided Christ’s pretensions, calling him “mad,” John 10:20. His kinsmen even went the length of proposing to restrain him by force, if necessary, from prosecuting his work, but before proceeding to extremities, his brethren and his mother remonstrated with him, Mark 3:31, and were answered in a way that could not

\* Lives of the apostles by Rev. D. F. Bacon, p. 416.