

Who was Zebedee in the Bible?

Although the name Zebedee is mentioned often in the New Testament, there is very little known about the man himself. His name is mentioned almost entirely in connection with his two famous sons, James and John, disciples of Jesus Christ and two of the inner three disciples.

We do know that Zebedee was a fisherman by trade. When Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He called to James and John, who were “in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets” (Matthew 4:21). James and John immediately left their father to follow Jesus. The promptness of their obedience to Jesus’ call may indicate that Zebedee and his sons were already familiar with Jesus’ ministry and that Zebedee fully approved of his sons’ calling. In those days, following a rabbi and learning from him was an honor, and it would have reflected well on Zebedee and his family. Mark 1:20 gives the added detail that Zebedee employed hired hands, who were also in the boat, which suggests that Zebedee was a man of some means. It also means that James and John were not leaving their father without help.

Reading between the lines in the story of the miraculous catch of fish, it seems that Zebedee’s family was in a partnership with Simon Peter’s family in their fishing venture: “Simon Peter . . . and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners” (Luke 5:8-10).

Zebedee was married to Salome (see Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40), one of “the women who had followed [Jesus] from Galilee” (Luke 23:49). Due to Salome’s presence at the crucifixion and at the tomb of Jesus three days later, it is probable that Zebedee’s

family were close followers of Jesus throughout His ministry.