Who was James, the brother of Jesus, in the Bible?

James was a son of Mary and Joseph and therefore a half-brother to Jesus and brother to Joseph, Simon, Judas, and their sisters (Matthew 13:55). In the Gospels, James is mentioned a couple of times, but at that time he misunderstood Jesus' ministry and was not a believer (John 7:2-5). James becomes one of the earliest witnesses of Jesus' resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). He then stays in Jerusalem and forms part of the group of believers who pray in the upper room (Acts 1:14). From that time forward, James' status within the Jerusalem church begins to grow.

James is still in Jerusalem when the recently converted Saul arrives to meet with him and Peter (Galatians 1:19). Several years later, when Peter escapes from prison, he reports to James about the miraculous manner of the escape (Acts 12:17). When the Jerusalem Council convenes, James is the apparent chairman (Acts 15:13, 19). He is also an elder of the church, called a "pillar" in Galatians 2:9. Later, James again presides over a meeting in Jerusalem, this time after Paul's third missionary journey. It is believed that James was martyred about A.D. 62, although there is no biblical record of his death.

James is the author of the epistle of James, which he wrote somewhere between A.D. 50 and A.D. 60. James identifies himself by name but simply describes himself as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1). His letter deals more with Christian ethics than Christian theology. Its theme is the outworking of faith—the external evidence of internal conversion.

A study of James' life provides some important lessons for us. His conversion gives testimony to the overwhelming power that came from being a witness of Jesus'

resurrection: James turned from being a skeptic to a leader in the church based on his meeting the resurrected Christ. James' speech at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:14-21 reveals his reliance on Scripture, his desire for peace within the church, his emphasis of grace over the law, and his care for Gentile believers, although he himself ministered almost exclusively to Jewish Christians. Also worthy of note is James' humility—he never uses his position as Jesus' blood relative as a basis for authority. Rather, James portrays himself as a "servant" of Jesus, nothing more. In short, James was a gracious leader through whom the church was richly blessed.