

DID MARY HAVE OTHER CHILDREN?

In seeking to exalt Mary above the place of honor given to her in the Bible, it has been widely taught that she never lived with Joseph in a normal family relationship, but remained a perpetual virgin. The passages in the Gospels that mention Christ's "brethren" are explained as referring merely to His "relatives." John the Baptist was a "relative" of Christ (Luke 1:36) yet he is never referred to as Christ's "brother."

What does the Bible teach on this matter?

"And [Joseph] kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son; and called His name Jesus" (Matt. 1:25 -- NASB). This declares Mary's virginity at the time Christ was born, but implies strongly that she did not remain a virgin afterward.

Matthew 13:55, 56 indicates that He had four brothers (James, Joses, Simon and Judas) and at least two sisters. They were not in sympathy with His ministry, for at that time they did not believe on Him (John 7:3 - 5). If Psalm 50:20, 21 is Messianic, as seems certain, the basic mistake His brothers made was that they failed to realize, or believe, that Christ was essentially different from them in His ancestry. *"You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. [They may have accused Him of being illegitimate] These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; [having an earthly father] But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes"* (Psa. 50:20, 21).¹

Later, after the death and resurrection of Christ, at least James and Judas (not Judas Iscariot) believed on Him, and were prominent among His disciples. Paul speaks of "*James the Lord's brother*" in Galatians 1:19. This is the James who took charge of the meeting recorded in Acts fifteen. Judas, the author of the book of Jude, was the brother of James (Jude, verse one) and thus also Christ's (half) brother -- though, in recognition of Christ's deity, and in fitting humility, he speaks of himself as "a bondservant of Jesus Christ."

The passage which settles the matter is Psalm 69:8, 9. *"I have become a stranger to my brothers, and an alien to my mother's children [mother's sons' in the NASB] because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me."* His disciples recalled this passage when He first cleansed the temple early in His ministry. *"Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise.' Then His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up'"* (John 2:13 - 17).

Christ's family stared, aghast, as He entered the temple -- the most holy place in the world to the Jews -- and totally disrupted, verbally and violently, the use being made of it by the top

¹The Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version unless noted otherwise.

leadership of Judaism. Their understandable response, like that of his friends in Mark 3:21, was, "He is out of His mind!" *"For even His brothers did not believe in Him"* (John 7:5). To paraphrase Psalm 69:8, 9, "Because I took it upon my self to drastically and violently cleanse the temple I have become like a stranger to my mother's children." Clearly, then, the passage predicts what Christ will be thinking at the time He cleanses the temple, and He calls His brethren, "my mother's children."

The virgin birth of Christ is carefully protected in Psalm 69:8. It is not "my father's children" but "my mother's children." They were, of course, His half brothers. This verse does more however – it indicates strongly that they were only half brothers. The Old Testament consistently determines genealogies through the father. There are two seeming exceptions to this rule. It is the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15, and "*a woman shall encompass a man*" in Jeremiah 31:22. But both of these verses have the virgin birth of Christ specifically in view, just as Psalm 50:20 and Psalm 69:8 do. Christ calls His brethren His mother's children because they had a different father than He did. Their father was Joseph, His Father was God!

Both Psalm 50:20 and Psalm 69:8 rule out the idea that His "brothers" were but cousins or such: His mother was their mother also. Mary did, indeed, have other children.

The Scriptural truth that Mary was a virgin at the time Christ was born is essential to a true concept of the deity of Christ, and is therefore necessary as a theological basis for our very salvation.

The truth that Mary did not remain a virgin afterward, but lived a normal life with Joseph, and had other children, exalts the purity of the home and the holy character of the husband and wife relationship.

It also eliminates one of the false concepts about Mary -- that she is a perpetual virgin -- which has been used to give her a place of exaltation beyond what is warranted by Scripture. Mary was, indeed, honored greatly when she was chosen to be the mother of Christ, but even she would want us to turn our eyes on HIM, rather than on her. She tried, at the marriage in Cana, to inform Him of the need, as though she knew something He did not know. She seemed also to suggest that she was more compassionate than He was, and He needed her motherly influence to get Him to solve their problem. She was lovingly and mildly rebuked. But the advice she gave others, advice we can take to heart for ourselves, is perhaps the best advice ever given. Mary said to the servants, "*Whatever HE says to YOU, do it!*" (John 2:5).