The Nag Hammadi Library

REVISED EDITION

The definitive new translation of the Gnostic scriptures, complete in one volume

James M. Robinson
General Editor
THE (FIRST) APOCALYPSE OF JAMES (V,3)

Introduced and translated by

WILLIAM R. SCHOEDEL

Edited by

DOUGLAS M. PARROTT

The manuscript names this writing The Apocalypse of James. We refer to it here as The (First) Apocalypse of James to distinguish it from the next writing (V,4) which the manuscript also entitles The Apocalypse of James. Our apocalypse is an excellent example of a "revelation dialogue." The partners in the dialogue are the Lord and James the Lord’s brother (though the latter is said to be the Lord’s brother only in a purely spiritual sense). In the first part of the writing (24,10-30,11) James addresses questions to the Lord that reflect his anxiety at the suffering soon to overtake both himself and the Lord, and the Lord provides James consolation in terms of standard gnostic teaching about the place of man in the universe. An oblique and very brief reference to the crucifixion in 30,12-13 serves as the turning point in the account. After the reappearance of the Lord, the story is dominated by a series of formulae transmitted to James to enable him to meet the challenges of the hostile powers who will attempt to block his ascent to "the Pre-Existing One" after his martyrdom (32,23-36,1). These formulae represent a dramatized version of texts that appear elsewhere in the context of rites for the dying in forms of Valentinian Gnosticism (Irenaeus, Haer. 1.21.5; Epiphanius, Pan. 36.3.1-6). It is worth noting, however, that at least one characteristic line that appears here ("I am an alien, a son of the Father’s race") has a close parallel in the Corpus Hermeticum (13.3). Other interesting matters taken up in the second part of our apocalypse include the directions concerning the handing on of the teaching in secret (36,13-38,11), the comments about the value of women as disciples (38,15-41,18), the mention of James’ rebuke of the twelve disciples (42,20-24), and the relatively lengthy account (now much mutilated) of James’ martyrdom at the conclusion of the writing.

The designation of James as “James the Just” (32,2-3; cf. 43,19) indicates contact with Jewish Christian tradition (cf. Hegesippus, in Eusebius, H.E. 2.23.4,7; Gospel according to the Hebrews, in Jerome, De viris int. 2; Gos. Thom., saying 12). The inclusion of Addai (36,15-24) in the list of figures who will hand on the teaching in secret points to contact with Syria and thereby possibly also to a Semitic form of Christianity (cf. Eusebius, H.E. 1.13). Some scholars have argued that numerous other themes in our apocalypse also betray the influence of Jewish Christian theology. But apart from the importance attributed to James the Just there is little in the writing that can with any confidence be attributed to the influence of Jewish Christianity in particular. There is a good possibility, then, that the figure of James was chosen by a circle of Gnostics as a convenient peg on which to hang their teaching.
One reason for the appeal of the figure of James was the fact that he stood outside the circle of twelve disciples and because of his relationship to Jesus (here understood in purely spiritual terms) could be appealed to as the originator of a purer form of Christian teaching than that represented by the twelve. In this connection, the command to hand on the teaching in secret presumably served to explain why it was that Gnosticism appeared to the uninitiated as a relatively late flowering of the religion of Jesus. Our apocalypse, in short, was attempting to present an alternative to the apostolic authority claimed for the teaching of a steadily advancing catholic form of Christianity. It appears, however, that whereas Jerusalem and Judaism are associated with the darker powers of the universe, the twelve (and thus catholic Christianity) move within the more beneficent spheres of the activity of Achamoth, the lesser Sophia.

Another reason for the appeal that the figure of James had for some Gnostics was that it enabled them to make more sense of the history of the first century. The fall of Jerusalem was an event that cried out for explanation. And though it soon seemed natural to attribute the disaster to the treatment of Jesus by the Jews (cf. Origen, Contra Celsum 2.13; Eusebius, H.E. 3.7), it was even more natural to connect the fall of Jerusalem with the treatment meted out to James by Jewish authorities just before the great war with Rome (Hegesippus, in Eusebius, H.E. 2.23). A careful Christian scholar was bound to find this disquieting (cf. Origen, Contra Celsum 1.47). Our apocalypse, however, has no such uneasiness and finds it possible to exploit the role of James for two reasons. First, the difference between the redeemer (the Lord) and the redeemed (James, the prototypical disciple) is significantly less pronounced in Gnosticism (cf. 27,8-10 where James is flatly identified with "Him-who-is"). Consequently, the two figures complement rather than rival one another in ways that are difficult for catholic Christianity to contemplate. Second, the general gnostic view that martyrdom could be (and in the minds of some Gnostics inevitably was) embraced for the wrong reasons made the emergence of resolve in this regard only after a long period of fear and anxiety a perfectly natural expectation. Thus the crucifixion of Jesus and the martyrdom of James are seen as complementary events, both of which are required for the full exemplification of the victory over the powers of darkness. In this connection, the defeat of the archons by James during his ascent to God is presumably connected with the fall of Jerusalem, the dwelling place (according to 25,15-19) of many archons.

A guide to the place of James the Just in early Christianity is provided by a fragment of Clement of Alexandria: "To James the Just and John and Peter the Lord transmitted the gnosis after the resurrection. They transmitted it to the other apostles. And the other apostles transmitted it to the seventy ..." (Eusebius, H.E. 2.1.4). The passage strongly suggests that there were three-main (no doubt overlapping) stages in the development of the image of James: 1) as James the Just, a symbol of Jewish-Christian values; 2) as the recipient of postresurrection revelation in a Gnosticizing milieu; and 3) as a colleague of the apostles of the Lord in a catholicizing milieu. Our apocalypse presumably reflects an interest in James that corresponds to the second main stage of the development of his image.

It should be noted finally that there is some evidence of the direct influence of esoteric Jewish speculation in our apocalypse. For it is only through an
unusual manipulation of numbers and an awareness of the importance of the number 72 in Jewish lore that we can account for the fact that "twelve hebdomads" (12 x 7) amount to "seventy-two heavens (26,2-18).

THE (FIRST) APOCALYPSE OF JAMES

V 24, 10-44, 10

The Apocalypse of James 1

It is the Lord who spoke with me: 1 "See now the completion of my redemption. 1 I have given you a sign of these things, James, 1 my brother. For not without reason have I called 15 you my brother, although you are not my brother 1 materially. And I am not ignorant 1 concerning you; so that 1 when I give you a sign — know and 1 hear.

"Nothing existed except 20 Him-who-is. He is unnameable 1 and inef-fable. 1 I myself also am unnameable, 1 from Him-who-is, just as I have been 1 [given a] number of names — two 25 from Him-who-is. And I, 1 [I] am before you. Since you have 1 [asked] concerning femaleness, female-ness existed, 1 but femaleness was 1 not [first]. And 30 [it] prepared for itself powers and gods. 1 But [it did] not exist [when] I came forth, 25 since I am an image of Him-who-is. 1 But I have brought forth the image of [him] 1 so that the sons of Him-who-is 1 might know what things are theirs 5 and what things are alien (to them). Behold, 1 I shall reveal to you everything 1 of this mystery. For they will seize 1 me the day after tomorrow. But my 1 redemption will be near." 10

James said, "Rabbi, you have said, 1 'They will seize me.' But I, 1 what can I do?" He said to me, 1 "Fear not, James. 1 You too will they seize. 15 But leave Jerusalem. 1 For it is she who always gives the cup of bitterness 1 to the sons 1 of light. She is a dwelling place 1 of a great number of archons. 20 But your redemption will be preserved 1 from them. So that 1 you may understand who they are [and] 1 what kinds they are, you will [...]. 1 And listen. They [are] not [...]. 25 but [ar-chons ...]. 1 These twelve [...], down [...]. 29 archons [...]. 26 upon his own hebdomad.'" 1

James said, "Rabbi, are there then 1 twelve hebdomads 1 and not seven as 5 there are in the scriptures?' 1 The Lord said, "James, he who spoke 1 concerning this scripture had a limited understanding. 1 I, however, shall reveal to you 1 what has come forth from him 10 who has no number. I shall give a sign concerning their 1 number. As for what has
come forth from him who has no measure, I shall give a sign concerning their measure.'

James said, "Rabbi, behold then, I have received their number. There are seventy-two measures!" The Lord said, "These are the seventy-two heavens, which are their subordinates. These are the powers of all their might; and they were established by them; and these are they who were distributed everywhere, existing under the authority of the twelve archons. The inferior power among them [brought forth] for itself angels [and] unnumbered hosts. Him-who-is, however, has been given on account of Him-who-is [... they are unnumbered. 27 If you want to give them a number now, you [will] not be able to (do so) until you cast away from yourself blind thought, this bond of flesh which encircles you. And then you will reach Him-who-is. And you will no longer be James; rather you are the One-who-is. And all those who are unnumbered will all have been named." 

(James said, "Then,)

Rabbi, in what way shall I reach Him-who-is, since all these powers and these hosts are armed against me?" He said to me, "These powers are not armed against you specifically, but are armed against another. It is against me that they are armed. And they are armed with other [powers]. But they are armed against me in judgment. They did not give [... to me in it [... through them [...]. In this place I suffering, I shall [...]. He will [...]

And I shall not rebuke them. But there shall be within me a silence and a hidden mystery. But I am fainthearted before their anger." James said, "Rabbi, if they arm themselves against you, then is there no blame?

You have come with knowledge, that you might rebuke their forgetfulness.
You have come with recollection, that you might rebuke their ignorance.

But I was concerned because of you.

For you descended into a great ignorance, but you have not been defiled by anything in it.
For you descended into a great mindlessness, and your recollection remained.

You walked in mud, and your garments were not soiled,
and you have not been buried in their filth,
and you have not been caught.

And I was not like them, but I clothed myself with everything of theirs.

There is in me forgetfulness,
yet I remember things that are not theirs. 25
There is in me [...] , I
and I am in their [...] .

[...] knowledge [...] not in their sufferings [...] . But I have become afraid [before them], since they rule. For what will they do? What will I be able to say? Or what word will I be able to say that I may escape them?"

The Lord said, "James, I praise your understanding and your fear. If you continue to be distressed, do not be concerned for anything else except your redemption. For behold, I shall complete this destiny upon this earth as I have said from the heavens. And I shall reveal to you your redemption."

James said, "Rabbi, how, after these things, will you appear to us again? After they seize you, and you complete this destiny, you will go up to Him-who-is." The Lord said, "James, after these things I shall reveal to you everything, not for your sake alone but for the sake of [the] unbelief of men, so that [faith] may exist in them. For [a] multitude will attain to faith [and] they will increase [in ...]. And after this I shall appear for a reproof to the archons. And I shall reveal to them that he cannot be seized. If they seize him, then he will overpower each of them. But now I shall go. Remember the things I have spoken and let them go up before you."

James said, "Lord, I shall hasten as you have said." The Lord said farewell to him and fulfilled what was fitting.

When James heard of his sufferings and was much distressed, they awaited the sign of his coming. And he came after several days. And James was walking upon the mountain, which is called "Gau-gelan," with his disciples, who listened to him [because they had been distressed], and he was [...] a comforter, [saying], "This is the (or: a) second [...] . Then the crowd dispersed, but James remained [...] prayer [...] , as 31 was his custom.

And the Lord appeared to him. Then he stopped (his) prayer and embraced him. He kissed him, saying, "Rabbi, I have found you! I
have heard of your sufferings, which you endured. And I have been much distressed. My compassion you know. Therefore, on reflection, I was wishing that I would not see this people. They must be judged for these things that they have done. For these things that they have done are contrary to what is fitting."

The Lord said, "James, do not be concerned for me or for this people. I am he who was within me. Never have I suffered in any way, nor have I been distressed. And this people has done me no harm. But this (people) existed as a type of the archons, and it deserved to be destroyed through them. But the archons, who (or: which) has but since it (fem.) angry with [ The] just is his servant. Therefore your name is James the Just." You see how you will become sober when you see me. And you stopped this prayer. Now since you are a just man of God, you have embraced me and kissed me. Truly I say to you that you have stirred up great anger and wrath against yourself. But (this has happened) so that these others might come to be."

But James was timid (and) wept. And he was very distressed. And they both sat down upon a rock. The Lord said to him, "James, thus you will undergo these sufferings. But do not be sad. For the flesh is weak. It will receive what has been ordained for it. But as for you, do not be [timid] or afraid." The Lord [ceased].

[Now] when James heard these things, he wiped away [the] tears in [his eyes] and very bitter (?) which is. The Lord [said] to him, "James, behold, I shall reveal to you your redemption. When you are seized, and you undergo these sufferings, a multitude will arm themselves against you that may seize you. And in particular three of them will seize you — they who sit (there) as toll collectors. Not only do they demand toll, but they also take away souls by theft. When you come into their power, one of them who is their guard will say to you, "Who are you or where are you from?" You are to say to him, 'I am a son, and I am from the Father.' He will say to you, 'What sort of son are you, and to what father do you belong?' You are to say to him, 'I am from the Pre-existent Father, and a son in the Pre-existent One.' [When he says] to you, you are to [say to him, ...] in the [that I might ...].

"[34 of] alien things?" You are to say to him, 'They are not entirely alien, but they are from Achamoth, who is the female. And she produced as she brought down the race from the Pre-existent One. So then they are not alien, but they are ours. They are
indeed ours because she who 10 is mistress of them is from 1 the Pre-existent One. 1 At the same time they are alien because 1 the Pre-existent One did not 1 have intercourse with her, when she 15 produced them. When he also says to you, 1 "Where will you go?," you are to 1 say to him, 'To the place from which I have come, 1 there shall I return.' 1 And if you say these things, you will 20 escape their attacks.

"But when 1 you come to 1 [these] three detainers 1 [who] take away souls by 1 theft in that place 25 [...] these. You 1 [...] a vessel 1 [...] much more than [...] 35 of the one (fem.) whom 1 you [...] for [...] 1 her root. You 1 too will 5 be sober [...] But I shall call 1 [upon] the imperishable knowledge, 1 which is Sophia who 1 is in the Father (and) who is the mother 1 of Achamoth. 10 Achamoth had no father nor 1 male consort, but 1 she is female from 1 a female. She produced you (pl.) 1 without a male, since she was alone 15 (and) in ignorance as to what 1 [lives through] her mother because she thought 1 that she alone existed. 1 [But] [I] shall cry out 1 to her mother. And then 20 they will fall into confusion (and) will 1 blame their 1 root and the race [of] 1 their mother. [But] you 1 will go up to [what is] 25 yours [...] 1 you will [...] 36 the [Pre-existent One].

"[They are 1 a] type [of the] twelve 1 disciples and [the] twelve 1 pairs, [...] 5 Achamoth, which is 1 translated 'Sophia.' 1 And who I myself am, 1 and (who) the imperishable Sophia (is) 1 through whom you will be redeemed, 10 and (who are) all the sons of Him-who-1 is — these things they have known 1 and have hidden within 1 them. You are to hide [these things] within you, 1 and you are to keep silence. 15 But you are to reveal them to 1 Addai. When you [depart], 1 immediately war will be [made] 1 with this land. [Weep], 1 then, for him who dwells in Jerusalem. 20 But let Addai take these things 1 to heart. In the tenth 1 year let Addai sit 1 and write them down. 1 And when he writes them down 25 [...] and they are to give them 1 [...] he has the [...] 37 6 he is [called] 1 Levi. Then he is to bring 1 [...] word 1 [...] from 10 [what I] said earlier 1 [...] a woman 1 [...] Jerusalem in her 1 [...] and] he begets 1 [two] sons through her. 15 [They are to] inherit these things 1 [and] the understanding of him who 1 [...] exalts. And they are to receive 1 [...] through him from his 1 intellect. Now, the younger of them 20 is greater. And 1 may these things remain 1 hidden in him until [he] 1 comes to the age of 1 seventeen years [...] 38 3 beginning [...] 5 through [them]. They will pursue 1 him exceedingly, since [they are] from 1 his [...] companions. He will be 1 proclaimed [through] them, 1 and [they will] proclaim this word. 10 [Then he will become] 1 a seed of [...] 1.
James said, "[If am] I satisfied [...] I and they are [...] 15 my soul. Yet [another thing] I Ask of you: who are the [seven] I women who have [been] your disciples? I And behold, I all women bless you. 20 I also am amazed I how [powerless] vessels I have become strong by a perception I which is in them." I [The] Lord [said], "You [...] well [...] 39 I a spirit [of ...], I a [spirit] of thought, [a spirit] 5 of counsel of [a ...], I a spirit [...] a spirit I of knowledge [...] of their I fear. [...] when we had passed I through [the breath] of 10 [this] archon who I is [named] Adonaios [...] him and [...] he was ignorant [...] when I came forth from him, 15 [he] remembered that I I am [a] son of his. He was gracious I [to me] at that time as I his son. And then, I before I 20 appeared here, I [he] I cast them among [this] I people. And from the [place] I of heaven the prophets [...]."

James [said], "Rabbi, [...] 6 I [...] all together [...] in them I especially [...] I."

The Lord said, "[James], I 10 praise [you ...] I walk upon the earth [...] I the words while he [...] I on the [...]. I For cast away from [you the] 15 cup, which is bitterness. I For some from [...] I set themselves against you. For [you have begun] I to understand [their roots] I from beginning to end. Cast 20 away from yourself all lawlessness. I And beware lest I they envy you. When you I speak these words of this I [perception], encourage these 25 [four]: Salome and Mariam I [and Martha and Arsinoe ...] 41 I since he takes I some [...] to me I he is [...] burnt offerings I and [...]. But I 10 [...] not in this way; but [...] I first-fruit[s] of the [...] upward [...] so that I the power [of God might] appear. 15 The perishable has [gone up] to the imperishable and I the female element has I attained to this male element." I

James said, 20 "Rabbi, into these three (things), then, I has their [...] been cast. I For they have been reviled, [and they have been] I persecuted [...]. 42 I Behold I [...] everything I [...] from I anyone [...]. I For you have received [...] of 10 knowledge. [And ...] I that what is the [...] I go [...] I you will [find ...]. I But I shall go [forth] I and shall reveal I that they believed in you [that they may] I be content with their [blessing] I and salvation, and I this revelation may come to pass." 20 And he went at that time I [immediately] and rebuked the I twelve, and cast I [out] of them contentment I [concerning the] way of knowledge [...].

43 And the majority I of [them ...] when they I [saw, the] messenger took in 10 [...]. The others [...] 12 said, "[...] 14 him from this earth. I For [he is] not [worthy] of life." I These, then, [were]
afraid. They arose, saying, "We have no part in this blood, for a just man will perish through injustice." James departed so that [...]. The Apocalypse of James