

The First Apocalypse of James

NHC V, 3 // CT 2 // P. Oxy. 5533

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The text narrates revelations passed along from Jesus to James and a series of subsequent successors through the early second century. This translation from the Coptic and Greek is by Samuel Zinner and was edited by Mark M. Mattison with the generous support of Other Gospels. Zinner's translation is based on the Coptic and Greek texts in:

The Nag Hammadi Library and Codex Tchacos:

Johanna Brankaer and Hans-Gebhard Bethge. *Codex Tchacos: Texte und Analysen*. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der althristlichen Literatur 161; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007, 81–254.

Peter Nagel. *Codex apocryphus gnosticus Novi Testamenti Band 2: Briefe und Apokalypsen aus den Schriften von Nag Hammadi und dem Codex Tchacos mit einer Neuausgabe der "Epistula Apostolorum."* Koptisch und Deutsch. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 503; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023, 67–124.

P. Oxy. 5533:

David W. Kim. "The First Apocalypse of James in a Socio-Linguistic Perspective: Three Greek and Coptic Versions from Ancient Monastic Egypt." *Religions* 15–8 (2024), 881; <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15080881>.

B. C. Landau, Geoffrey S. Smith, W. B. Henry. "5533. First Apocalypse of James." In A. Benaissa, M. Zellmann-Rohrer. Editors. *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri Volume LXXXVI*. Graeco-Roman Memoirs, No. 107; London: The Egypt Exploration Society, with the British Academy, 2021, 3–13.

Images available at: https://portal.sds.ox.ac.uk/articles/online_resource/P_Oxy_LXXXVI_5533_First_Apocalypse_of_James/21186583

Symbols

- [] Gap in the text (known as a "lacuna")
- () Editorial insertion to clarify the text
- < > Editorial correction of a scribal error
- { } Text erroneously added by the scribe
- [24] Page number of the Coptic codex

Introduction: Jesus and James

[24] The Lord, however,¹ has spoken with me: “Behold now the fulfillment of my redemption. I have granted you a sign concerning these matters, James, my brother, because not in vain have I called you my brother, even though you are not my materialistic² brother, and I am not ignorant regarding you, in order that <you>, when I grant you a sign: know and hear!

[10] “Because I see (the completion) of my redemption, I will instruct you concerning these matters, James, my brother, because not in vain are you called ‘brother,’ though my materialistic brother [you are] not, but you lack recognition concerning yourself, so that [I] will instruct you concerning who I am.³

The Existent One

Nothing existed except the Existent One.⁴ I myself, I cannot be named, being from the Existent One, so that I [have been given a] number of names, twofold⁵ from the Existent One. I, however, I existed before you did.

Hear! Nothing existed except the Existent One.⁶ He [cannot be named, and] he is [inexpressible among those who] exist or who will come into [existence]. I, however, am from the Existent One, and I cannot be named, although [I] have been named with [a number of] names, [because] they do not belong to me; they are [alien] to me. However, the [first] I am not, because second am I, from the Existent One.⁷

¹ The use of “however” in the first sentence indicates the original opening has been lost.

² “Materialistic,” Nagel, “nach irdischer Art,” i.e., according to the earthly kind. The Coptic *ḥulē*, from Greek *hulē*, “matter,” does not imply that James and Jesus are not physical brothers. As Nagel, 75 explains, here Jesus “refers instead to the different spheres from which the revealer and the recipient of revelation originate.” (My translation from the German, here and below). Additionally, Jesus could be asserting that he is not a “hylic,” that is, one of those ruled by material impulses, but that he is a pneumatic, that is, one of those ruled by the divine Spirit. As part of its “gnostic” trajectory, *I Apoc. Jas.* transmits several “Jewish-Christian” traditions, and is therefore unlikely to reflect any denial of Jesus’ and James’ relation as full siblings.

³ The spiritual identity of James is bound together with that of Jesus, which in turn is bound together with God.

⁴ An echo of the divine name that plays off the Tetragrammaton in LXX (and Coptic) Exod 3:14.

⁵ “Twofold”; cf. CT: “However, the [first] I am not, because *second* am I, from the Existent One.”

⁶ An echo of the divine name that plays off the Tetragrammaton in LXX (and Coptic) Exod 3:14, but preceded by the introductory “Hear!” of Deut 6:4, which is directed to “Israel,” the second name of the patriarch Jacob, i.e., the Greek and Hebrew form behind “James.”

⁷ This may hint at the two Tetragrammatons of Deut 6:4, the first thought of as referring to the Father, the second to the Son.

Achamoth (the “Lower Wisdom”) Creates Powers and Divinities

Because you have asked concerning femaleness:⁸ Femaleness existed, but femaleness did not exist [at the beginning], and she prepared for herself powers and divinities, but [she] did not exist [when] I came forth, [25] given that I am an image of the Existent One, but I have brought the image of [him], so that the children of the [Existent One] could know who belong to them and who the aliens are.

Behold! I will reveal to you everything of this mystery, because I will be apprehended the day after tomorrow, but my redemption will be near.”

James said: “Rabbi, you said, ‘I will be apprehended,’ but I, what will I be able to do (for you)?”

He said to me: “Do not be afraid, James. They will apprehend you as well, but turn yourself away from Jerusalem,⁹ because this is she who always gives the cup of bitterness to the Sons of

Because you [have] asked concerning femaleness, hear! The female existed, but she did not exist from the beginning. She made (for) herself [powers] and divinities. While the Existent One exists from the beginning, the female also exists, but not from the beginning. [11] I, however, am come from the image of the Existent One, in order to instruct you concerning the Existent One, and also [to instruct] you concerning the image of the powers, so that the children of the Existent One will know those who belong to them, and those who do not belong to them.

Behold! I have revealed to you the mystery. [After] three [days I] will be [apprehended. Then they will abuse] me, [the multitude] of [priests] and the elders, and they will revile me, [and they will curse me], but my [redemption will be] near.”

The Twelve Archons

[James, however], answered, he said: “Rabbi, what are you saying? If they apprehend you, then what am I to do (for you)?”

He answered him, saying: “When they apprehend you, and stone you, you will be redeemed, but do not return on the way to Jerusalem, because she is the one who always gives the cup of bitterness [12]

⁸ “Femaleness,” i.e., Achamoth-Sophia.

⁹ A hint at the “flight to Pella” tradition relating to the First Jewish War that broke out in 66 CE.