

The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception

13 - James 'The Righteous'

If James played so important a role in the events of the time, why do we know so little about him? Why has he been relegated to the status of a shadowy figure in the background? Those questions can be answered simply enough.

Eisenman stresses that James, whether he was literally *Jesus'* brother or not, had known *Jesus* personally in a way that Paul never did. In his teachings, he was certainly closer to 'the source' than Paul ever was. And his objectives and preoccupations were often at variance with Paul's - were sometimes, indeed, diametrically opposed. For Paul, then, James would have been a constant irritant. With the triumph of *Pauline Christianity*, therefore, James's significance, if it couldn't be obliterated completely, had, at the very least, to be diminished.

Unlike a number of personalities in the New Testament, James does seem to have been an historical personage, and, moreover, one who played a more prominent role in the affairs of his time than is generally recognized. There is, in fact, a reasonably copious body of literature pertaining to James, even though most of it lies outside the canonical compilation of the New Testament.

In the New Testament itself, James is mentioned in the Gospels as one of *Jesus'* brothers, though the context is generally vague or confusing and has obviously been tampered with. In Acts, as we have discussed, he assumes rather more prominence, though it is not until the second part of Acts that he emerges in any kind of perspective. Then, with Paul's letter to the Galatians, he is clearly identified as the leader of the 'early Church', who resides in Jerusalem and is attended by a council of elders.¹

Apart from those that impinge on Paul, however, one learns little of his activities, and even less about his personality and biography. Neither is the Letter of James in the New Testament of much value in this respect. The letter may indeed derive from a text by James, and Eisenman has drawn attention to its Qumranic style, language and imagery.²

It contains (James 5:6) an accusation whose significance will become apparent shortly - an accusation to the effect that 'you murdered the righteous [or just] man'.³

Again, however, no personal information is vouchsafed.

Such is James's role in scripture proper. But if one looks further afield, a portrait of James does begin to emerge. This is the research which Eisenman has been pursuing over the last few years. One source of information he has emphasized is an anonymous text of the 'early Church', the so-called 'Recognitions of Clement', which surfaced very early in the 3rd century. According to this document, James is preaching in the Temple when an unnamed 'enemy', accompanied by an entourage of followers, bursts in.

The 'enemy' taunts James's listeners and drowns out his words with noise, then proceeds to inflame the crowd,

'with revilings and abuse, and, like a madman, to excite everyone to murder, saying, "What do ye? Why do ye hesitate? Oh, sluggish and inert, why do we not lay hands upon them, and pull all these fellows to pieces?" '4

The 'enemy' does not confine himself to a verbal assault. Seizing a brand of wood, he begins to flail about with it at the assembled worshippers, and his entourage follow suit.

A full-scale riot ensues:

Much blood is shed; there is a confused flight, in the midst of which that enemy attacked James, and threw him headlong from the top of the steps; and supposing him to be dead, he cared not to inflict further violence upon him.⁵

James, however, is not dead. According to the 'Recognitions', his supporters carry him back to his house in Jerusalem. The next morning, before dawn, the injured man and his supporters flee the city, making their way to Jericho, where they remain for some time - presumably while James convalesces.⁶

For **Eisenman**, this attack on James is pivotal. He notes the parallels between it and the attack on Stephen as recounted in Acts. He suggests that *Stephen may be an invented figure*, to disguise the fact that the attack - as Acts could not possibly have admitted - was really directed at James. And he points out that Jericho, where James flees for refuge, is only a few miles from Qumran.

What is more, he argues, the flight to Jericho has a ring of historical truth to it. It is the kind of incidental detail that is unlikely to have been fabricated and interpolated, because it serves no particular purpose. As for the 'enemy', there would seem to be little doubt about his identity.

The 'Recognitions of Clement' concludes:

Then after three days one of the brethren came to us from Gamaliel... bringing us secret tidings that the enemy had received a commission from Caiaphas, the chief priest, that he should arrest all who believed in Jesus, and should go to Damascus with his letters...⁷

The surviving editions of Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* contain only one reference to James, which may or may not be later interpolation. The chronicle reports that the Sanhedrin, the religious high court, call before them James, 'the brother of *Jesus* who was called *Christ*'.⁸

Accused (most improbably) of breaking the Law, James and certain of his companions are found guilty and accordingly stoned to death. Whether this account is accurate, doctored or wholly invented, the most important aspect of it is the date to which it refers. Josephus indicates that the events he has described occurred during an

interval between Roman procurators in Judaea.

The incumbent procurator had just died. His successor, Lucceius Albinus, was still en route to Palestine from Rome. During the interregnum, effective power in Jerusalem was wielded by the high priest, an unpopular man named Ananas. This allows the account of James's death to be dated at around AD 62 - only four years before the outbreak of the revolt in AD 66.

Here, then, is at least some chronological evidence that James's death may have had something to do with the war that ravaged the Holy Land between AD 66 and 73. For further information, however, one must turn to later Church historians.

Perhaps the major source is Eusebius, 4th-century Bishop of Caesarea (the Roman capital of Judaea) and author of one of the most important early Church histories. In accordance with the conventions of the time, Eusebius quotes at length from earlier writers, many of whose works have not survived. In speaking of James, he cites Clement, Bishop of Alexandria (c. AD 150-215).

Clement refers to James, we are told, as 'the Righteous', or, as it is often translated, 'the Just' - 'Zaddik' in Hebrew.⁹ This, of course, is the by now familiar Qumranic usage, whence derives the 'Teacher of Righteousness', the leader of the Qumran community. According to Clement, Eusebius reports, James was thrown from a parapet of the Temple, then beaten to death with a club.¹⁰

Later in his chronicle, Eusebius quotes extensively from a 2nd-century Church historian, **Hegesippus**. All of Hegesippus' works were reputedly extant as late as the 16th or 17th century. Everything has since disappeared, though copies may well exist in the Vatican, as well as in the library of one or another monastery - in Spain, for example.¹¹ At present, however, almost everything we have by Hegesippus is contained in the excerpts from his work cited by **Eusebius**.

Quoting Hegesippus, Eusebius states that James 'the Righteous' 'was holy from his birth':

he drank no wine ... ate no animal food; no razor came near his head; he did not smear himself with oil, and took no baths. He alone was permitted to enter the Holy Place [the Holy of Holies in the Temple], for his garments were not of wool but of linen [i.e. priestly robes]. He used to enter the Sanctuary alone, and was often found on his knees beseeching forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel's... Because of his unsurpassable righteousness, he was called the Righteous and... 'Bulwark of the people'...¹²

At this point, it is worth interrupting the text to note certain intriguing details. James is said to wear linen, or priestly robes. This was the prerogative of those who served in the Temple and belonged to one of the priestly families, traditionally the Sadducean 'aristocracy' who, during the 1st century, came to an accommodation with Rome and the Herodian dynasty of Roman puppets. Again, Eisenman points out, **Epiphanius**, another Church historian, speaks of James wearing the mitre of the high priest.¹³

Then, too, only the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum and most sacred spot in the Temple.

- *What, then, can James be doing there -and without eliciting any explanation or expression of surprise from Church historians, who seem to find nothing untoward or irregular in his activities?*
- *Did he, perhaps, by virtue of his birth, have some legitimate right to wear priestly apparel and enter the Holy of Holies?*
- *Or might he have been acting, as Eisenman suggests, in the capacity of a kind of 'opposition high priest' - a rebel who, defying the established priesthood's accommodation with Rome, had taken upon himself the role they had betrayed?14*

Certainly the established priesthood had no affection for James. According to Hegesippus, the 'Scribes and Pharisees' decide to do away with him, so that the people 'will be frightened and not believe him'.

They proclaim that 'even the Righteous one has gone astray',¹⁵ and invoke a quote from the Old Testament - in this case from the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 3:10) - to justify their actions. They note that Isaiah had prophesied the death of the 'Righteous One'. In murdering James, therefore, they will simply be bringing Isaiah's prophecy to fulfillment. But also, in using this quote from Isaiah, they are following a technique employed in both the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament.

Eisenman points out that, just as this quote is used in order to describe the death of James, so the Qumran community employs similar 'Righteousness' passages from the New Testament in order to describe the death of the 'Teacher of Righteousness'.¹⁶

Eusebius goes on to describe the death of James in the following manner:

So they went up and threw down the Righteous one. They said to each other 'let us stone James the Righteous', and began to stone him, as in spite of his fall he was still alive... While they pelted him with stones... [a member of a particular priestly family] called out: 'Stop! What are you doing...?' Then one of them, a fuller, took the club which he used to beat clothes, and brought it down on the head of the Righteous one. Such was his martyrdom... Immediately after this Vespasian began to besiege them.17

Vespasian, who became emperor in AD 69, commanded the Roman army that invaded Judaea to put down the revolt of AD 66. Here again, then, is a chronological connection between James's death and the revolt. But Eusebius goes further. The connection for him is more than just chronological.

The entire 'siege of Jerusalem', he says, meaning presumably the whole of the revolt in Judaea, was a direct consequence of James's death - 'for no other reason than the wicked crime of which he had been the victim'.¹⁸

To support this startling contention, Eusebius invokes Josephus. The passage of Josephus he quotes, although no longer to be found in any extant version of Josephus, was unquestionably what Josephus wrote, because **Origen**, one of the earliest and most prolific of the *Church Fathers*, quotes precisely the same passage.

Referring to the revolt of AD 66 and the Roman invasion that followed, Josephus states that,

'these things happened to the Jews in requital for James the Righteous, who was a brother of Jesus known as Christ, for though he was the most righteous of men, the Jews put him to death'.

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From these fragments pertaining to James, a scenario begins to take form. James, the acknowledged leader of the 'early Church' in Jerusalem, represents a faction of Jews who, like the Qumran community, are 'zealous for the Law'. This faction is understandably hostile towards the Sadducee priesthood and the high priest Ananas (appointed by Herod²⁰), who have betrayed their nation and their religion by concluding an accord with the Roman administration and its Herodian puppet-kings.

So intense is this hostility that James arrogates to himself the priestly functions which Ananas has compromised.²¹ Ananas' supporters respond by contriving James's death. Almost immediately thereafter, the whole of Judaea rises in revolt, and Ananas is himself one of the first casualties, assassinated as a pro-Roman collaborator. As the rebellion gains momentum, Rome is forced to react, and does so by dispatching an expeditionary force under Vespasian.

The result is the war which witnesses the sack of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in AD 68, and which does not end until the fall of Masada in AD 74.

The only uncertain element in this scenario is the nature and magnitude of the part played by James's death. Did it merely coincide chronologically? Or was it, as Josephus and Eusebius assert, the primary causal factor? The truth, almost certainly, lies somewhere in between: the revolt stemmed from enough contributing factors for the historian not to have had to fall back on James's death as a sole explanation. On the other hand, the evidence unquestionably indicates that James's death was not just a marginal incident. It would seem to have had at least something to do with the course of public events.

In any case James, as a result of Eisenman's analysis, indubitably emerges as a more important personage in 1st-century history than Christian tradition has hitherto acknowledged. And the 'early Church' emerges in a very different light. It is no longer a congregation of devotees eschewing politics and public affairs, pursuing a course of personal salvation and aspiring to no kingdom other than that of heaven.

On the contrary, it becomes one of the manifestations of Judaic nationalism at the time - a body of militant individuals intent on upholding the Law, deposing the corrupt Sadducee priesthood of the Temple, toppling the dynasty of illegitimate puppet-kings and driving the occupying Romans from the Holy Land. In all these respects, it conforms to conventional images of the Zealots.

But what has all this to do with Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls?

From the Acts of the Apostles, from Josephus and from early Christian historians, there emerges a coherent, if still incomplete, portrait of James, 'the Lord's brother'. He appears as an exemplar of 'righteousness' - so much so that 'the Just', or 'the Righteous', is appended as a sobriquet to his name.

He is the acknowledged leader of a 'sectarian' religious community whose members are 'zealous for the Law'. He must contend with two quite separate and distinct adversaries. One of these is Paul, an outsider who, having first persecuted the community, then converts and is admitted into it, only to turn renegade, prevaricate and quarrel with his superiors, hijack the image of *Jesus* and begin preaching his own doctrine - a doctrine which draws on that of the community, but distorts it.

James's second adversary is from outside the community - the high priest Ananas, head of the Sadducee priesthood. Ananas is a notoriously corrupt and widely hated man. He has also betrayed both the God and the people of Israel by collaborating with the Roman administration and their Herodian puppet-kings. James publicly challenges Ananas and eventually meets his death at the hands of Ananas' minions; but Ananas will shortly be assassinated in turn.

All of this takes place against a backdrop of increasing social and political unrest and the impending invasion of a foreign army.

With this scenario in mind, **Eisenman** turned to the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, and particularly the 'Habakkuk Commentary'. When the fragmentary details of the Qumran texts had been assembled into a coherent sequence, what emerged was something extraordinarily similar to the chronicle of Acts, Josephus and early Christian historians.

The scrolls told their own story, at the centre of which was a single protagonist, the 'Teacher of Righteousness' - an exemplar of the same virtues associated with James. Like James, the 'Teacher' was the acknowledged leader of a 'sectarian' religious community whose members were 'zealous for the Law'. And like James, the 'Teacher' had to contend with two quite separate and distinct adversaries.

One of these was dubbed the 'Liar', an outsider who was admitted to the community, then turned renegade, quarreled with the 'Teacher' and hijacked part of the community's doctrine and membership. According to the 'Habakkuk Commentary',

the 'Liar' 'did not listen to the word received by the Teacher of Righteousness from the mouth of God'.²²

Instead, he appealed to 'the unfaithful of the New Covenant in that they have not believed in the Covenant of God and have profaned His holy name'.²³

The text states explicitly that,

'the Liar... flouted the Law in the midst of their whole congregation'.²⁴

He 'led many astray' and raised 'a congregation on deceit'.²⁵ He himself is said to be 'pregnant with [works] of deceit'.²⁶ These, of course, are precisely the transgressions of which Paul is accused in Acts - transgressions which lead, at the end of Acts, to the attempt on his life. And Eisenman stresses Paul's striking hypersensitivity to charges of prevarication and perjury.²⁷

In 1 Timothy 2:7, for example, he asserts indignantly, as if defending himself, that 'I am telling the truth and no lie'.

In II Corinthians 11:31, he swears that:

'The God and Father of the Lord Jesus... knows that I am not lying.'

These are but two instances; Paul's letters reveal an almost obsessive desire to exculpate himself from implied accusations of falsity.

According to the Dead Sea Scrolls, the 'Liar' was the adversary of the 'Teacher of Righteousness' from within the community. The 'Teacher's' second adversary was from outside. This was the 'Wicked Priest', a corrupt representative of the establishment who had betrayed his function and his faith.²⁸ He conspired to exterminate the 'Poor' - those 'zealous for the Law' - said to be scattered about Jerusalem and other places.

He harried the 'Teacher of Righteousness' wherever the 'Teacher' sought refuge. At the hands of the 'Wicked Priest's' minions, the 'Teacher' suffered some serious injury and possibly - the text is vague on the matter - death. Subsequently, the 'Wicked Priest' was himself assassinated by followers of the 'Teacher', who, after killing him, 'took vengeance upon his body of flesh' - that is, defiled his corpse.²⁹

The parallels between the 'Wicked Priest' of the scrolls and the historical figure of the high priest Ananas are unmistakable.

In his book on James, **Eisenman** explores these parallels - James, Paul and Ananas on the one hand, the 'Teacher of Righteousness', the 'Liar' and the 'Wicked Priest' on the other - in exhaustive detail. He goes through the 'Habakkuk Commentary' and other texts line by line, comparing them with information vouchsafed by Acts, by Josephus and by early Christian historians.

In our own pages, it would be impossible to do adequate justice to the weight of evidence he amasses. But the conclusions of this evidence are inescapable. The 'Habakkuk Commentary' and certain other of the Dead Sea Scrolls are referring to the same events as those recounted in Acts, in **Josephus** and in the works of early Christian historians.

This conclusion is reinforced by the striking and pervasive recurrence of Qumranic philosophy and imagery in Acts, in the Letter of James and in Paul's copious epistles. It is also reinforced by the revelation that the place for which Paul embarks and in which he spends three years as a postulant is in fact Qumran, not the city in Syria. Even the one fragment that would not, at first, appear to fit - the fact that the persecution and death of James occurs quite specifically in Jerusalem, while the Dead Sea Scrolls have been assumed to chronicle events in Qumran - is explained within the texts themselves.

The 'Habakkuk Commentary' states explicitly that the leadership of the community were in Jerusalem at the relevant time.³⁰

There is another point which Eisenman stresses as being particularly important. In the Letter to the Romans (1:17), Paul states that,

"this is what reveals the justice of God to us: it shows how faith leads to faith, or as scripture says: the upright man finds life through faith".

The same theme appears in the Letter to the Galatians (3:11):

"the Law will not justify anyone in the sight of God, because we are told: the righteous man finds life through faith".

These two statements constitute, in effect, 'the starting-point of the theological concept of faith'. They are

ultimately, as Eisenman says, 'the foundation piece of Pauline theology'.³¹ They provide the basis on which Paul is able to make his stand against James - is able to extol the supremacy of faith, while James extols the supremacy of the Law.

From where does Paul derive this principle of the supremacy of faith? It was certainly not an accepted part of Judaic teaching at the time. In fact, it derives from the original Book of Habakkuk, a text of Old Testament apocrypha believed to date from the mid-7th century BC. According to Chapter 2, Verse 4 of the *Book of Habakkuk*, 'the upright man will live by his faithfulness'. Paul's words in his letters are clearly an echo of this statement; and the [Book of Habakkuk](#) is clearly the 'scripture' to which Paul refers.

More important still, however, is the '[Habakkuk Commentary](#)' - the gloss and exegesis on part of the *Book of Habakkuk* found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The '[Habakkuk Commentary](#)' cites the same statement and then proceeds to elaborate upon it:

*But the righteous shall live by his faith. Interpreted, this concerns all those who observe the Law in the House of Judah, whom God will deliver from the House of Judgment because of their suffering and because of their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness.*³²

This extraordinary passage is tantamount, in effect, to a formulation of early 'Christian' doctrine. It states explicitly that suffering, and faith in the 'Teacher of Righteousness', constitute the path to deliverance and salvation. From this passage in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, Paul must have derived the foundation for the whole of his own theology.

But the passage in question declares unequivocally that suffering and faith in the 'Teacher of Righteousness' will lead to deliverance only among 'those who observe the Law in the House of Judah'.³³

It is just such emphasis on adherence to the Law that Paul contrives to ignore, thereby precipitating his doctrinal dispute with James and the other members of the 'early Church'.

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