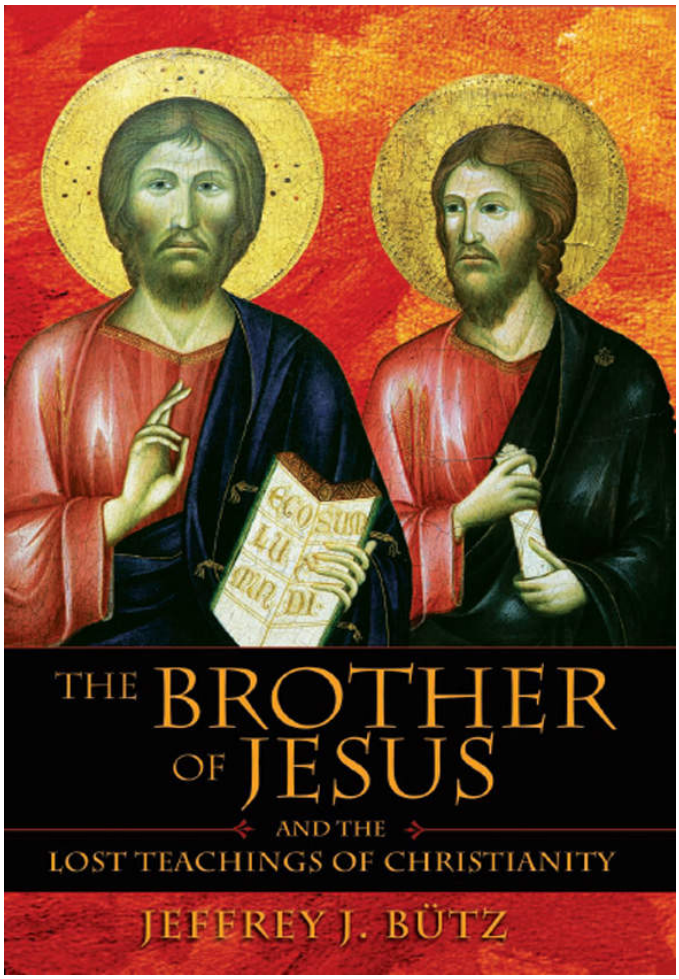
THE BROTHER OF JESUS

AND THE LOST TEACHINGS OF CHRISTIANITY

JEFFREY J. BÜTZ



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PREFACE

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honor of kings is to search out a matter.

PROVERBS 25:2

I did not learn my theology all at once, but have always had to dig deeper and deeper.

MARTIN LUTHER

After years of research, I have come to the conclusion that the role of James in the early church has been marginalized over the centuries—both consciously and unconsciously—and continues to be repressed today. The purpose of this book is to explain why this marginalization of James has occurred and to articulate the controversy that has surrounded the brother of Jesus for almost two millennia. It is my belief that understanding the role of James in the early church will make for no less than a revolution in our understanding of Jesus, the nature of the early church, and the relationship of Christianity to Judaism and Islam.

My fascination with James, the brother of Jesus, can be traced to a course I took in graduate school called the Quest for the Historical Jesus. This course led to my concentrating in the discipline of

historical Jesus studies for a Master of Sacred Theology (S.T.M.) degree and eventually to my thesis topic: James.

In the course of my early research, I came across a volume of some thousand pages on the subject of the historical James entitled *James the Brother of Jesus* by Robert Eisenman, professor of Middle Eastern Religions at California State University. I opened to the introduction and read:

> It is to the task of rescuing James, consigned either on purpose or through benign neglect to the scrapheap of history, that this book is dedicated . . .
>
> Mentioned in various contexts in the New Testament, James the Just has been systematically downplayed, or written out of the tradition . . .
>
> . . . but in the Jerusalem of his day in the 40s to 60s *C.E.*, he was the most important and central figure of all—the "Bishop" or "Overseer" of the Jerusalem church.[1]

This certainly captured my attention. Eisenman's opening statements made it sound as though an outright conspiracy was afoot to erase James from history. I found the book riveting, but also quite at odds with the mainstream biblical scholarship taught in most seminaries. I soon discovered that while Eisenman has impeccable academic credentials, his theories are considered rather *outré* (to put it politely) by most scholars. Infamous in academic circles for waging a long campaign to prove that the sectarian writings of the Essene community (the community that collected the Dead Sea Scrolls) are in fact the writings of the early Christian movement, Eisenman argues that the Essenes *were* the early Christians. This has been a highly controversial and mostly rejected theory that has been proposed by various scholars ever since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Even more controversially, Eisenman purports that the enigmatic leader of the Essene community, known only as the "Teacher of Righteousness" in the community's writings, is actually James; and his nemesis, who is called the "Spouter of Lies," is

actually Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. This is highly controversial stuff, indeed, and the advice given me was to cast a wary eye on Eisenman.

Nevertheless, Eisenman's book opened up a window on the importance of James in the early church about which I had been oblivious. The more I delved into James, the more I became increasingly fascinated by a figure who was obviously of major importance and influence in the early church, but whose role is indeed, as Eisenman claims, curiously muted in the New Testament and generally ignored in modern scholarship. Because of the few overt references to James in the New Testament, his great significance, which is plainly demonstrable, has gone largely unrecognized. Here was a mystery I could not resist, and I ended up focusing my research on James.[2] I had no inkling when I completed my thesis in the spring of 2002 that James would soon rise to international prominence.

That fall came the announcement of the discovery of an artifact claimed to be James's ossuary, or burial box, an archaeological windfall that created international headlines and quickly directed a long overdue spotlight on James.[3] Now, thanks to major articles in national news magazines and front page headlines in newspapers across the globe, it seems that everyone knows that Jesus had a brother. Yet, despite all this recent attention, there is a dearth of major studies on James. Aside from Eisenman, the only other comprehensive study is Australian scholar John Painter's 1997 book, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition.* While *Just James* is the work of a more mainstream scholar, Painter's thesis echoes Eisenman:

> The study of James remains neglected. I hope that Just James will encourage a recovery of the recognition of how significant James was in the history of earliest Christianity and provide some explanation of how and why that significance has been obscured in most of the surviving traditions.[4]

Except for Eisenman and Painter, there were no other major studies of James published in English when I wrote my thesis. At the time, the only other scholar who had done significant work in the area of the historical James was British scholar Richard Bauckham, who had published one extended essay on James and the Jerusalem church and a book on the rest of Jesus' family, entitled *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church.* [5] All other information that existed had to be gleaned mainly from commentaries and papers on books in the New Testament, particularly those in which James plays a major role—the epistle of James, Acts (chapters 15 and 21), and Galatians (chapter 2).

But there are signs that scholars are beginning to pay attention. In response to Eisenman and Painter, several scholarly colloquies on James have convened, one result of which has been the publication of two volumes of research papers on James.[6] Interestingly, these scholars came to the same conclusion as Eisenman and Painter before them: "The lack of serious and sustained investigation of the historical figure of James 'the Just,' brother of Jesus, is one of the curious oversights in modern critical study of Christian origins."[7]

The book you are now reading is an attempt to correct this "curious oversight" and make the findings of an intriguing scholarly debate available to a wider audience. The work that has been done on James has been written by scholars for scholars, and the general public remains uninformed. The recently published popular work on the discovery of the James ossuary, *The Brother of Jesus,* by Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington, is intended for a general audience, yet leaves much to be desired. The second part of the book, written by Witherington, a noted conservative historical Jesus scholar, gives a well-summarized overview of what we presently know about James, but does not touch upon much of the scholarly controversy surrounding James. Although a first-class scholar, Witherington adheres to the traditional representation of James and unveils little of the man who has been emerging in the research of the past century and a half. I propose to present here the far more controversial face of James. If many Christians are shocked to

discover that Jesus had a brother, they will be even more shocked to discover what recent research into James is revealing about the nature of the early church and the beliefs and teachings of Jesus.

In the course of this book, we shall examine all of the primary historical sources on James and the major sources of secondary interpretation that have appeared since the rise of modern critical scholarship in the early 1800s. Having been personally influenced by the current renaissance in historical Jesus studies,[*1] my overall methodology is primarily historical-critical.

Bruce Chilton, in his introduction to the recent compendium *James the Just and Christian Origins,* expresses disdain for recent efforts to recover the historical Jesus, an endeavor that he characterizes as hopeless and bankrupt.[8] I could not disagree more. I have come to believe that historical "questing" is of vital importance to Christian theology in today's postmodern world where many academics now consider the possibility of attaining any certain historical knowledge an impossibility, a trend in theology that began with Rudolph Bultmann.

In the early 1990s, the widely respected New Testament scholar James Dunn expressed strong support for historical methodologies at a time when scholars were increasingly turning away from historical criticism to pursue the trendiest areas of literary research:

> [E]ndless fascination with Jesus and the beginnings of Christianity is well reflected in a seemingly non-stop flow of films, plays, musicals and documentaries on these themes. We have responsibility to ensure that such curiosity of the "person in the street" is met with well researched answers—otherwise it will be the imaginative storylines of the merely curious, or the tendentious portrayals of those with an axe to grind, or the fantasizing of the sensation-mongers which will set the images for a generation addicted to the television screen.
>
> It is hardly surprising that all these factors have given rise to what is often now referred to as "the third quest of the historical Jesus"—where it is *precisely the readiness to recognize and give*

> *weight to the Jewish context and character of Jesus . . .* which has provided the fresh stimulus and the new angle of entry into the Jesus-tradition.[9]

In light of the enormous popularity of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code,* Dunn's rationale is even more cogent today. My personal predilection is for this type of "third quest" approach taken by scholars such as E. P. Sanders, Geza Vermes, and N. T. Wright, which takes seriously the thorough Jewish-ness of Jesus. It is, above all, the Jewishness of Jesus to which modern research into James points; and, as we shall see, it is the Jewishness of Jesus and James that was a major reason for James's leading role in the early church being suppressed; and it is still the reason why the findings of recent research into James continue to be resisted by most Christian scholars.

On a personal level, my research into James has proven to be an incredibly enriching and rewarding spiritual exercise, opening my eyes to whole new vistas on Jesus and the origins of the Christian church. The past years have also been a time of great spiritual wrestling for me, causing me to question and reexamine some of my most deeply held theological beliefs. Discovering what James believed about his older brother has forced me to significantly change my understandings of Jesus and the beginnings of Christianity. But my overriding goal all along has been a quest for truth—no matter where it may lie, and no matter what inherited dogmas may need to be abandoned in order to attain it.

It is my hope that the fruits of my struggles—contained in this book—can be a guide to future researchers and spiritual pilgrims in making their way through the dangerous minefield one encounters when trying to recover the historical James after nearly twenty centuries of neglect and abuse. And I have an even grander hope that the insights and understandings that James provides us on his brother Jesus might at long last bring healing to the festering wounds of the Western world caused by the misunderstanding, hatred, and

warfare among the three great Western religions and their political heirs.

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible. A list of abbreviated source titles can be found in the back of the book.

CHRONOLOGY

6–4 B.C.E.	The birth of Jesus
27–29 C.E.	The ministry of John the Baptist
30–33[*2]	The ministry of Jesus
30–33	The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus
32–35	The conversion of the apostle Paul
34–38	Paul's first visit to Jerusalem (James already an acknowledged leader of the Jerusalem church)
41–44	The imprisonment of Peter (traditional date that James succeeds Peter as head of the Jerusalem church)
44	James, son of Zebedee, becomes first martyred apostle
47–56	Paul conducts missionary tours among the Gentiles
48–49	Paul's second visit to Jerusalem
49	Jerusalem Conference held (First Apostolic Council), Apostolic Decree issued
50	Paul writes earliest letters (1 and 2 Thessalonians)
55	Galatians composed
56	Paul's final visit to Jerusalem
62	James's death; Jesus' cousin Symeon succeeds James as head of Jerusalem church
66–73	Jewish revolt against Rome; Jewish Christians flee to Pella
70	Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple
66–70	The gospel of Mark composed
80–85	The gospel of Matthew composed
85–90	The gospel of Luke and Acts composed
81–96	Domitian searches for Davidic pretenders and interrogates the grandsons of Jude
90–95	The gospel of John composed
100–110	Justus succeeds Symeon as head of the Jerusalem church
132–35	Second Jewish Revolt, Hadrian expels Jews from Jerusalem

150–80	Hegesippus composes *Memoranda*
300–324	Eusebius composes *Ecclesiastical History*
325	Council of Nicaea
610	Muhammad receives first revelation Jerusalem

INTRODUCTION: OF REVOLUTIONS AND PARADIGM SHIFTS

As we enter the third millennium, our human community is rent by war, increasing distrust, and the loss of a sense of our common nature and past. We seem to be more tempted than ever to define ourselves in opposition to the Other and more threatened than ever by a paradigm, or worldview, that separates rather than unites us. Yet things are not as they seem, and James, the brother of Jesus, is the key to understanding ourselves differently.

This book is an examination of an emerging paradigm shift in the field of New Testament studies, specifically in our understanding of Christian origins and the nature of the early church. Within these pages we shall uncover the beginnings of a revolution that has the potential to change our understanding of Western religion forever. This emerging paradigm shift has yet to be recognized by the majority of biblical scholars and theologians, even though the evidence has been plainly staring us in the face from the pages of the Bible for two millennia. The obvious is not always so easy to see.

Three philosophical revolutions in human understanding have taken place since the rise of modern science. The philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn coined the term “paradigm shift” to describe the sweeping changes in worldview that accompany such revolutions. The first of these paradigm shifts was caused by the implications of the mathematical calculations of the astronomer Nicholas Copernicus (subsequently confirmed by the telescopic observations of Galileo) that we live in a heliocentric (sun-centered), not a geocentric (earth-centered) solar system. Such was the

enormity of the change in worldview caused by this discovery that it has rightly come to be called the Copernican Revolution. As with most scientific revolutions, the Copernican Revolution was vehemently opposed by the Christian church.

The second such revolution was the more recent Darwinian Revolution. If the paradigm shift that accompanied the Copernican Revolution displaced humanity from the center of the universe, the Darwinian Revolution and its accompanying paradigm shift humbled us even further, demoting humans from their status as the “crown” of God’s relatively recent supernatural creation to a modest rank as a by-product of natural evolution. The third revolution began in the 1920s, and the full impact of its accompanying paradigm shift has yet to be fully felt. While not a commonly accepted term, I would dub it the Hubble Revolution, after the American astronomer Edwin Hubble, who first came to the conclusion that our Milky Way galaxy —thought at the time to comprise the entire universe—was merely one single “island universe” in a seemingly infinite sea of hundreds of billions of other galaxies. The paradigm shift necessitated by the Hubble revolution makes the downsizing of humanity’s significance that followed the Copernican and Darwinian revolutions pale in comparison.

Amid all of the religious and societal upheaval engendered by these three major paradigm shifts in human awareness, smaller and lesser known paradigm shifts have more quietly occurred in many fields of human endeavor. A prime example is the grudging acceptance of the theory of continental drift by geologists in the 1960s. Since the discovery of the Americas, many had taken notice of the curious fact that the shorelines of the eastern coasts of North and South America, and the western coasts of Europe and Africa seemed to match up like perfectly fitting jigsaw-puzzle pieces. The vast majority of scientists shrugged this off as nothing more than an interesting coincidence. Still, a few people harbored a suspicion that the almost perfect match of the continental shorelines was more than coincidence. In 1911, the geologist Alfred Wegener was the first to seriously propose that the Americas and Europe and Africa really

were once connected. Wegener and the few who agreed with him were widely ridiculed. Wegener's problem was that he could not provide an explanation of *how* continents could drift, but despite the censure of his peers, Wegener, like Galileo before him, bravely stood by the commonsensical conviction of what his eyes showed him.

It was not until the 1950s that oceanographers mapping the Atlantic Ocean floor made the startling discovery of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the biggest mountain chain on earth (located in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean). All along this mountain chain, lava is continuously spewing up from the earth's mantle, literally pushing the ocean floor apart and slowly but inexorably pushing the Americas and Europe and Africa away from each other. Sea-floor spreading, as this process came to be called, was the needed explanation for how continents could move. Almost overnight the theory of continental drift went from the category of quack theory to proven fact, and it was quickly christened with the more academically respectable name of "plate tectonics." It is enlightening to note that as late as 1960 geologists or oceanographers who dared to say they believed in continental drift would pretty much ruin their academic careers. Less than ten years later, any scientist who *denied* the new scientific dogma of plate tectonics had become the pariah.

History has proven, through many such examples, that the human mind is inherently conservative. The obvious is not always easily seen, and the truth is often firmly resisted in order to hold onto the "assured results" of authoritative scholarship. It is not, of course, news that humans have an innate tendency toward conservatism that impels us to quash contrary opinions, no matter how self-evident. The great Galileo was placed under house arrest by the church for going public with the evidence his eyes showed him. But it is not only scientists who have been forced to pay high prices for redefining the way we understand our world. Such injustices happen in all fields of research, perhaps none more so than the field of theology. Theologians who dare to challenge theological dogma are as ostracized by their peers as scientists who challenge scientific dogma. Just one of many recent examples is the shameful treatment

of the Dead Sea Scrolls scholar Robert Eisenman, whose peers in an effort to discredit his theories on James and Christian origins went so far as to publicly accuse him of plagiarism (unjustly, as it turned out).[10] Paradigm challenges are never suffered lightly by the orthodox establishment in any field.

In some ways, challenging paradigms is harder today than it ever has been because the modern academic world is a world of minute specialization. As a result, today's scientists, philosophers, and theologians often suffer from severe myopia, their noses so buried in the details of their particular fields of research that the forest is often missed for the trees. The days of the classic philosopher, whose job it once was to fit the pieces of research from various fields together into larger theoretical pictures, is gone. The branch of philosophy known as metaphysics, whose task it originally was to systematically organize all knowledge into overarching paradigms, is frowned upon today. Postmodern thinking has declared such efforts bankrupt. This book, however, dares to synthesize all the evidence we have about James and the early church, and the result is a view of the man and the church that is radically at odds with accepted wisdom and scholarship. The theories I present in this book are not new. They have all been proposed before, but have either been sheepishly ignored or unfairly discredited. To rectify matters, we will here survey all the extant evidence that exists on James, along with running commentary by scholars that shows how this material has been interpreted. You will find that I have let the scholars speak largely for themselves, and I have worked hard to let all of the voices—both liberal and conservative—be heard.

In part 1 we will examine the nature of Jesus' family. After an overview of the evidence for James's relationship to Jesus and James's role in the early Christian community in chapter 1, in chapter 2 we undertake a detailed examination of the nature of Jesus' family as seen in the four gospels, which will lay a firm foundation for all that follows. The exact familial relationship of Jesus to his brothers and sisters has been a matter of controversy between Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant Christians, and

Jesus' relationship to his family during his ministry has largely been misinterpreted by almost all Christian scholars, with tangible consequences in the history of Christianity.

In part 2 we investigate the nature of the earliest Christian community—generally referred to as the Jerusalem church—of which James was the leader. In chapter 3 we examine the evidence from the New Testament about this community, particularly the testimony of the early church history written by Luke (the book of Acts) and the invaluable firsthand testimony of Paul, particularly his letter to the Galatians. In chapter 4 we undertake an analysis of two watershed events in the history of earliest Christianity: the Apostolic Council held in Jerusalem (described in Acts 15), and the incident at Antioch where Peter and Paul come to loggerheads over the issue of table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. Both these events provide us with significant amounts of information about James's leadership role in the Jerusalem church. In chapter 5 we will discuss the dynamics and friction between Paul and the Jerusalem Christians that finally sparked when Paul made his final visit to Jerusalem and which led to his arrest and imprisonment in Rome. We will also take at look at the fascinating account of James's martyrdom from the respected Jewish historian Josephus.

Part 3 examines the nature of a fascinating phenomenon in early Christianity that scholars generally refer to as Jewish Christianity, a widespread community that retained its Jewish roots, beliefs, and practices while adhering to Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and revering the memory of James. Chapter 6 surveys the literature on James and Jewish Christianity that exists in the writings of early church historians and the church fathers, while chapter 7 surveys the writings on James that come from later Jewish Christian and Gnostic communities whose beliefs caused them to be branded as heretics by the Catholic Church.

In light of the first three parts, part 4 examines the nature of orthodoxy and heresy. Here we shall be led to some startling conclusions about who were the orthodox and who were the heretics in early Christianity. We shall see why Christianity inevitably parted

ways with parent Judaism, and why there continues to be an impassible divide between Christians, Jews, and Muslims—one that has led to the precarious state of political affairs in the Western world today and even to which the blame for such tragic events as 9/11 can be attributed. Finally, in part 5 we shall endeavor to synthesize all of our information into a new paradigm that can perhaps repair the tragic breach between the children of Abraham.

If I have made any original contribution to the debate about James, it is simply in performing the philosophical task of bringing others' findings together to allow a bigger picture to emerge. Many theologians would prefer for this emerging picture not to be put on public display, for its implications will have major repercussions not only on the average Christian, but on Jews and Muslims as well. If and when it is ever fully realized, the emerging paradigm shift presented here could forever change how the three great Western religions—the "people of the Book," as the Qur'an calls the descendants of Abraham—understand their holy scriptures and their relationship to each other. This paradigm shift could even help to usher in—at long last—peace in the Middle East.

The story of this nascent revolution begins at the epicenter of Western religion: the city of Jerusalem, where Jews and Christians first parted ways almost two millennia ago. Our story begins with two first-century Jewish brothers named Jesus and James.

1

THE NATURE OF JESUS' FAMILY

1

PERSONA NON GRATA: JAMES THE BROTHER OF JESUS

> *Jesus . . . came to his hometown . . . On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?"*
>
> THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK 6:1–3

Jesus had siblings. This simple, seemingly innocuous statement actually raises a host of profound questions, the answers to which have startling implications. Perhaps it is because these questions are so sensitive to some Christians—indeed, divisive—that the subject of Jesus' brothers and sisters has largely been ignored both by biblical scholars and by the Christian church. Yet the evidence of Jesus' siblings is so widespread that there can be no doubt of their existence. The amount of information that exists on Jesus' brothers, particularly James, is quite surprising. As we see above, Mark even provides the names of Jesus' four brothers; nonetheless, in my experience both as a pastor of a Lutheran church and an instructor of world religions in a public university, people are almost always incredulous when told that Jesus had brothers and sisters. This is

not something they have usually been taught in church or Sunday School.

The recent discovery, in 2002, of an ancient Middle Eastern ossuary (a burial box) made international headlines because of the startling inscription on the box, which identified this particular ossuary as once containing the bones of “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.” This find was shocking both to the academic community and the general public for two reasons. First, if genuine (and this is still a hotly debated question), the artifact would be the first archaeological evidence—literally written in stone—of the existence of Jesus, but even more intriguing to the public was the fact that this burial box was purported to be that of *James*, whom the New Testament refers to in several places as the “brother” of Jesus. The many newspaper and magazine articles that appeared after the announcement of this discovery all gave short shrift to the ossuary itself and devoted the majority of space to the controversy over whether Jesus could have had a brother. That is what most fascinated the public.

FROM JACOB TO JAMES

We shall not go here into the particulars of the discovery and testing of the ossuary, which has been amply documented elsewhere;[1] instead, our focus will be on the person whose bones are claimed to have once been entombed in that box: the brother of Jesus, most commonly known in church tradition as “James the Just” (because of his exceeding righteousness) or “James of Jerusalem” (his base of operations) or, much more rarely, “James the Brother of Jesus.”

James’s name is derived from one of the great patriarchs of Jewish history—Jacob. “James” is the English translation of the Greek *Iakob,* which is itself a translation of the Hebrew *Ya’akov.* In the English translation of the Greek New Testament, *Iakob* is always translated as “Jacob” when referring to Old Testament figures, and as “James” when referring to Christian figures. This is interesting because, as we shall see, James represents a bridge between Judaism and Christianity. The Greek “Jacob” became the English

“James” by way of Latin, in which *Jacobus* and *Jacomus* are variations of the same name. The Latin also explains why in European history the dynasty of King James is referred to as “Jacobite” or “Jacobean.”

Iakob was an exceedingly common name in first-century Israel, as evidenced by the fact that eight different people in the New Testament bear the name. The scholarly consensus is that half of the occurrences of the name in the New Testament refer to James the son of Zebedee (the brother of John, also referred to as James the Elder), one of two apostles who bear the name. A third of the occurrences of the name refer to Jesus’ brother, who is, unfortunately, often confused with the James known as James the Less, but James the Less is correctly James the son of Alphaeus, the second of the two apostles who bear the name. That the brother of Jesus has sometimes been called James “the Less” is just one example of the many slights and indignations he has been forced to bear.

It is surprising that such widespread ignorance of Jesus’ siblings exists, for, besides the New Testament itself, there exist quite a number of non-canonical writings from the earliest days of the church that provide absolutely reliable evidence that Jesus not only had siblings, but that some (if not all) of his brothers played significant roles in the leadership of the early church. In fact, James was considered by many early Christians to be the first “bishop” of the church, the successor to Jesus following the crucifixion, making James in essence the first “pope,” not Peter as Catholic tradition has maintained. The church father Clement of Alexandria in his work *Hypostases* (Outlines), written at the beginning of the third century, makes the following rather startling statement: “After the ascension of the savior, Peter, James [the Son of Zebedee], and John did not claim pre-eminence because the savior had specifically honored them, but chose James the Just as Bishop of Jerusalem.”[2] While Clement’s use of the title “bishop” is certainly an anachronism, it is a term that, as we shall see, does accord well with James’s role in the church as it is described in both the book of Acts, Luke’s history of

the early church from the ascension of Jesus to Paul's imprisonment in Rome, and in Paul's letter to the Galatians, where Paul describes two meetings he had with James and the other apostles in Jerusalem.

James the Just, as Clement calls him, is the appellation by which Jesus' brother has most commonly been known in the church's writings. It is a title originally bestowed upon James by early Jewish-Christian groups such as the Nazoreans, the Ebionites, and the Elkesaites, who revered James for his outstanding righteousness under the Law and considered him to be the leader of the apostles after the death of Jesus. These Jewish-Christian sects claimed to be the remnants of the original Jerusalem church which had been scattered and dispersed after the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E., a claim that, if true, would make them direct successors to the apostles. These groups and their startling claims will be discussed in part 4.

In light of the widespread esteem for James in many quarters of the early church, we are compelled to ask why it is that he is almost completely unknown among modern-day Christians. It can justifiably be said that of all the figures in the New Testament, he is the most mysterious. If one reads through the New Testament from the beginning, the first major reference to James comes at Acts 12:17, where Peter goes to the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, after miraculously escaping from prison, and urges her to "Tell this to James and the brethren." What is curious here is that the reader is given no explanation of who James is, an omission that is especially striking because he has not been mentioned before in Acts. The only logical conclusion one can come to is that James was of such stature in the early Christian community that Luke (the author of Acts) simply assumed his readers were well aware of who James was. He was obviously important enough that Peter wanted the news of his escape from prison to reach James first. It would also seem from Peter's statement that James was the leader of "the brethren," since he is singled out by name. Note well that this would mean James was the leader of the Jerusalem church by at least the

early 40's C.E., when this incident most likely occurred (Jesus' crucifixion is generally dated between 30 and 33).

Just as puzzling as this reference in Acts is Paul's mention of James in his first letter to the Christian community in Corinth—his famous list of those to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection:

> [H]e appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. (1 Cor. 15:5–7)

Here, as in Acts, Paul apparently assumes his audience is well acquainted with James, for again no identification is given. It is significant that of all of those to whom Jesus appeared only Cephas (Cephas is Aramaic for Peter) and James are important enough to be singled out by name. So while James is almost completely unknown to modern readers, it would seem that the early readers of the New Testament writings were well acquainted with him and that in the earliest days of Christianity he was a major figure, equal in stature to Peter, well known to the earliest Christians, and not easily confused with any other James (of whom there were many).

BISHOP OF THE CHURCH

As one reads further in Acts, the significance of James's role in the affairs of the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem—commonly referred to as the "Jerusalem church"—becomes clear. At some point early on, James becomes the head of the Jerusalem church (if he hadn't always been so, a question we shall examine shortly), apparently having authority even over Peter, who has traditionally been considered the leader of the disciples following Jesus' death. In Acts 15, James is clearly the central figure in the great debate about how Jewish law applied to Gentile converts and is even portrayed as the final arbiter at the so-called Jerusalem Conference, convened to decide this question, and as the author of the "Apostolic Decree" that was issued there.

James's leadership of the Jerusalem church is surprising for a number of reasons. First, the impression one gets from the gospels is that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him and were opposed to his mission. For example, the gospel of John shows Jesus' brothers apparently challenging him:

> Now the Jewish festival of booths was near. So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things show yourself to the world." (For not even his brothers believed in him.) (John 7:2–5)

John's parenthetical comment makes clear why *he* believed Jesus' brothers challenged him.

A second reason that the evidence for James's leadership of the Jerusalem church comes as such a surprise is that Peter is traditionally thought of as the leader of the apostles, the "rock" on which Jesus built his church, in Roman Catholic tradition the first pope, or spiritual leader. It is therefore astounding to discover such clear evidence in the New Testament, as well as in later history and tradition, that James was actually the leader of the Jerusalem church. As we shall see, even Peter bows to his authority.

A number of scholars have pointed out that if anyone deserves the title of first pope, by virtue of being the first leader of the Christian church, it is James, not Peter. So how do we account for James's rapid rise to such prominence (especially if James had been a nonbeliever, as is traditionally assumed), and why has James's prominent role become so obscured? As we investigate these questions, we shall see that a real revolution is under way in our understanding of the history and development of the early church. James turns out to be the key that unlocks a dusty old vault containing a treasure trove of information that the ecclesiastical powers-that-be have attempted to conceal for close to two millennia.

BROTHER OF JESUS

Connected to these questions about James's role in the church is the more imposing question of his relationship with his brother Jesus, as well as the question of Jesus' relationship to the rest of his family. As we have already seen, certain statements in the gospels seem to imply that the members of Jesus' family did not believe in Jesus' work and ministry during his lifetime. Traditionally, both scholars and clergy have considered Jesus' family highly skeptical of —and even opposed to—Jesus' mission, a conclusion based mainly on the following passage from the gospel of Mark:

> Jesus went back home, and once again such a large crowd gathered that there was no chance even to eat. When Jesus' family heard what he was doing, they thought he was crazy and went to get him under control. (Mark 3:20–21, CEV)

Given that portrayal of the family, it is puzzling to note how quickly they must have converted from nonbelievers to believers after the crucifixion; for opposed to the picture that Mark paints, the first chapter of Acts clearly demonstrates a close bond between Jesus' family and the disciples not long after the crucifixion:

> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet . . . When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, *including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.* (Acts 1:12–14; italics mine)

Here we have evidence that Jesus' mother and brothers were not only all present in Jerusalem within weeks of the crucifixion, but that they also spent intimate time in prayer with Jesus' disciples, which is unlikely if they had been opposed to Jesus and the apostles' mission. We also have evidence here that Jesus' brothers are *not* to be identified with the apostles, refuting the commonly heard

argument from some quarters that references to Jesus' brothers in the Bible are to be understood as meaning his "spiritual" brothers, that is, his disciples.

While biblical evidence states clearly that Jesus had brothers, the exact relationship of Jesus to those whom the New Testament calls his "brothers and sisters" has been hotly debated by scholars and theologians, many contending that these are not actually *blood* brothers and sisters. By the end of the fourth century, three positions on this question had been established. According to the so-called Epiphanian view, named after its main proponent, the fourth-century bishop Epiphanius, and championed by the third-century theologian Origen and fourth-century bishop Eusebius, the "brothers" and "sisters" mentioned in the New Testament are all older than Jesus—sons of Joseph from a previous marriage, and hence only stepbrothers of Jesus. This view is still the official position of the Eastern Orthodox churches. Another viewpoint, the Hieronymian theory, was first proposed by the church father Jerome and argues that those whom the New Testament calls brothers and sisters were actually Jesus' *cousins*—children of Mary's sister. This remains the official Roman Catholic position. How these ideas arose will be examined later, but for now, it is sufficient to point out that these positions were developed early on to uphold the emerging dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary. An ever-virgin Mary obviously could not have had children other than Jesus unless they had also been miraculously conceived.

The stance taken in this book is the position traditionally known as the Helvidian view, after the Roman theologian Helvidius, which understands the brothers and sisters of Jesus cited in the New Testament to be full siblings of Jesus, born to Mary and Joseph after the firstborn Jesus. This understanding is able to retain the doctrine of the virgin birth, but does not claim an ever-virgin Mary. This has been the traditional Protestant position. It is the most natural reading of all the New Testament citations that we shall examine, and requires no bending or stretching of the plain reading of the original Greek text. Also in support of this view we have Luke's famous

words in the Nativity story: “And she gave birth to her *first-born* son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7). If Jesus was an only child, why would Luke use the term “first-born”? Another piece of evidence for Mary and Joseph having normal conjugal relations after the birth of Jesus, comes from the gospel according to Matthew: “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but *before they came together*, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18, NIV). “Before they came together” is a classic biblical euphemism along the lines of “Adam knew Eve.”

The number of references in the New Testament to Jesus having natural siblings is not insignificant. Mention is made of Jesus’ brothers in all four gospels. There are seven references altogether: Mark 3:31–35 and 6:3; Matthew 12:46–50 and 13:55–56; Luke 8:19–21; and John 2:12 and 7:3–5. James is cited several times in the book of Acts, where he plays a huge role in the leadership of the disciples in the decades following Jesus’ crucifixion (Acts 12:17; 15:13–21; 21:17–26). Paul speaks of meeting with James in his letter to the Galatians (1:19 and 2:1–12), giving us the most solid and undisputed evidence we have that James was a prominent leader of the Jerusalem church. In all these instances, James clearly seems to be understood as the natural brother of Jesus. Further evidence for the role of Jesus’ brothers is found in 1 Corinthians, where we learn not only that James was a witness to the Resurrection, but also that Jesus’ other brothers were traveling evangelists. Paul states in passing:

> This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to our food and drink? Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? (1 Cor. 9:5)

Paul’s words are startling. Not only does this passage provide further evidence that Jesus’ brothers are not to be identified with the apostles, but it also claims that Jesus’ brothers and the apostles

(including Peter) were *married*; a two-fold strike against the traditional Catholic teaching that bases the requirement of priestly celibacy on the understanding that Jesus and his apostles were not married.[*3] In fact, according to Mark's gospel, one of Jesus' first miracles is curing Peter's mother-in-law of a fever.[†4]

Finally, in addition to all of the other evidence to be found in the New Testament, there are two letters attributed to brothers of Jesus —the letters of James and Jude—although their actual authorship is a much debated question.

EARLY HERO

References to James also abound outside of the Bible. First and foremost, independent attestation to the remarkable role James played in apostolic times is found in the writings of the revered Jewish historian Josephus, whose works *The Wars of the Jews* and *The Antiquities of the Jews* are contemporaneous with the New Testament. In these highly regarded histories, Josephus actually discusses James at greater length than Jesus.

Many early church Fathers also discuss James, including Clement, Eusebius, Hegesippus, Jerome, and Origen. James is also highly regarded—indeed, revered—in many of the apocryphal books that were excluded from the New Testament, such as the *Gospel of the Hebrews* and the *Protevangelium of James*—a book wholly about James. The famous cache of Gnostic writings discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945 includes several works that bear James's name in their titles, such as the *Apocryphon of James*, the *First Apocalypse of James,* and the *Second Apocalypse of James.* There are also references to James in the now highly regarded *Gospel of Thomas,* championed by many scholars as a legitimate "fifth gospel." These writings all bear witness to the high esteem in which James was held among early Christians.

James is looked to as the apostle par excellence by early Jewish-Christian sects such as the Ebionites and Elkesaites, who revered James while disdaining Paul and his desire to jettison the requirement that Gentile converts adhere to Jewish law. As we shall

see, James is at the storm-center of the early debate over how the Jewish law applied to Gentile converts to Christianity. It was James's exceeding righteousness under the Law that led to these Jewish-Christian groups giving him the epithet "the Just." It was their desire to adhere to James's upholding of faith *and* works (see James 1:17) rather than Paul's teaching of faith in Christ as a replacement for the Law, that caused these early Jewish-Christian sects to be labeled as heretics by the emerging Catholic orthodoxy. Many scholars today are beginning to recognize that an understanding of the phenomenon generally referred to as "Jewish Christianity" is vital to our understanding of how and why Christianity parted ways with Judaism to become a distinct religion.

The importance of Jewish Christianity for an understanding of the early church was first recognized by the notorious liberal German scholar Ferdinand Christian Baur of Tübingen University, who in the early 1800s proposed that the accepted idea of unity and harmonious cooperation among the earliest Christians was a fiction. Baur and his followers (the so-called Tübingen school) posited a sharp division, even an outright battle, between Paul and Jesus' apostles over the issue of Jewish law. While conservative scholars forcefully opposed Baur's theories and his ideas fell out of favor by the early 1900s, a number of major scholars today are beginning to reevaluate Baur in light of the most recent understandings of the thorough Jewishness of Jesus exemplified in the writings of such respected scholars as E. P. Sanders, Geza Vermes, and James Dunn.

The rediscovery of the Jewishness of Jesus is causing a renaissance of sorts in the study of the historical Jesus, a subject that is as fraught with lack of consensus in its current manifestation as it was back in the days of Albert Schweitzer and his groundbreaking work *The Quest of the Historical Jesus.* James actually provides one of the most solid pieces of evidence we have in the often illusory quest for the historical Jesus. Indeed, James is a vital key to an understanding of the beliefs and teachings of Jesus. As maverick scholar Robert Eisenman starkly puts it: "Once James

has been rescued from the oblivion into which he was cast . . . [it] will no longer be possible to avoid . . . the obvious solution to the problem of the Historical Jesus . . . the answer to which is simple. Who and whatever James was, so was Jesus."[3]

FORGOTTEN HERO

Regrettably, the memory of James, his relationship to his brother Jesus, and his significant contributions to the early church became lost in the official history and teaching of Christianity for reasons both benign and malignant. James's story is thus a tragic one. Because the knowledge we have of Jesus' siblings is threatening to those with vested theological or ecclesiastical interests, James was forgotten, downplayed, and even intentionally suppressed. In the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, adherence to the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary makes the notion of Jesus having natural siblings scandalous. In the Protestant tradition, James's seeming support for "works righteousness," especially as it was understood from the New Testament letter of James ("Faith without works is dead," James says in chapter 1), was viewed as antithetical to the all-important Protestant doctrine of *sola fide* (faith alone). It was for this reason that Martin Luther referred to the epistle of James as an "epistle of straw," and would have much preferred its removal from the New Testament. From about the fourth century, disdain for James and his teachings—and even for acknowledging his existence—spread wide. As a result, his vital contributions to the early church were lost. Nonetheless, when the role of James is recovered and objectively assessed, it can justifiably be said that James is the great "lost hero" of Christianity.

My research into James's understanding of the Jewish law has impelled me, as a Lutheran pastor, to come to grips with the question of where Jesus would have stood in the debate over the Law in the early church. Frankly, I have been swayed by the evidence to believe that Jesus was much more Law-oriented than most Protestants (and Lutherans especially) have ever realized. I have come to harbor a strong suspicion that Protestantism may have carried the doctrine of

sola fide to an extreme that Jesus himself would not have advocated.

The so-called new perspective on Paul and Second Temple Judaism that has been burgeoning in recent decades has attempted to correct this Protestant misunderstanding by demonstrating that the Law-oriented Judaism of Jesus' day valued salvation by grace much more than Christians have ever realized. While it may come as quite a surprise to most Protestant Christians, the widely respected New Testament scholar James Dunn has shown that the Father of the Reformation, Martin Luther, who based his insights on "salvation by grace through faith" in Paul's writings, largely misunderstood Paul's theology:

> Luther read his own experience back into Paul. He assumed that Paul too must have been confronted by a dominant tradition which taught justification by works . . . that the Judaism of Paul's day must have taught the equivalent of the Catholicism of Luther's day . . . Unfortunately the grid remained firmly in place for Protestant scholarship thereafter.[4]

The conservative Protestant scholar, Richard Bauckham, has also recognized this:

> [A] theological tradition which originated with Martin Luther subordinates [the epistle of] James to Paul . . . Luther famously deplored James's contradiction of the Pauline . . . doctrine of justification by faith alone . . . and relegated James to a virtually apocryphal status on the margin of the canon.[5]

Undoubtedly, this is the major reason for the marginalization of James in the Protestant tradition.

Current research into Paul is making it quite obvious that the early Protestant reformers, due to the pressing issues of the Reformation, grossly misunderstood the Judaism of Jesus' day, the Judaism to which both Jesus and James adhered. A recovery of James's understanding of the Law can provide a much-needed

correction to this misunderstanding, just one more example of why recovering James is so important to Christianity today. Recovering James and his teaching is not only an important step toward resolving the centuries-old Catholic-Protestant debate over the relative merits of works and faith, but it is also vital to expanding the interfaith dialogue between Christians, Jews, and Muslims. James may well be the missing link that can bring peace and reconciliation to “the people of the Book.”

As should be obvious by now, salvaging James from the distortion, misrepresentation, abuse, and neglect to which he has been subjected will necessitate exploring many different avenues of research. So let us turn now to an investigation of how James and Jesus’ other siblings are portrayed in the only biographies we have of Jesus—the four gospels. Many more surprises await us.

2

A FAMILY DIVIDED: JESUS' FAMILY IN THE GOSPELS

Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK 3:20–21 (NIV)

For not even his brothers believed in him.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN 7:5 (NRSV)

Because of statements in the gospels such as those above, the vast majority of scholars and theologians have understood Jesus' family to be opposed to (or at least highly skeptical of) Jesus' ministry and mission during his lifetime. A standard reference work found on the bookshelves of almost all clergy, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, unequivocally states that Jesus' brothers:

> did not approve of Jesus' ministry. This is clear in the . . . gospels. Jesus himself . . . said that a prophet is without honor "in his own house" (Matt. 13:57; Mark 6:4). This clearly implies opposition within his own family.[1]

Many standard preaching commentaries of a prior generation share this assessment. For example, Barclay's *Daily Study Bible* in its commentary on Mark 3:20–21 says: "Jesus' own family had come to the conclusion that He had taken leave of his senses."[2] The *Cambridge Bible Commentary* concurs: "Jesus' own relations think he must be mad: instead of following his father's trade and settling down to an ordinary life, he is mixed up . . . so they try to rescue him."[3]

Uncritical acceptance of such commentary has left the impression in many people's minds that Jesus' rejection by his family is historical fact. Some recent scholarship, however, presents a more nuanced view, suggesting that passages such as Mark 3:20–21 are open to divergent interpretations and may even turn the traditional interpretation on its head. If one accepts the standard line that Jesus' family was opposed to his mission, some interesting questions are raised when one moves from the gospels to the book of Acts and the letters of Paul. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the speed with which Jesus' mother and brothers shifted from being nonbelievers to believers after the crucifixion is perplexing in light of what the gospels say about them. As the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* summarizes the situation: "The [New Testament] . . . regards the brothers of the Lord as . . . unresponsive to his preaching during his earthly ministry, but active and leading members of the church from the beginning of the apostolic age."[4]

The widely respected evangelical scholar, F. F. Bruce, succinctly puts the question this way: "How . . . did it come about that [Jesus'] relatives, who did not figure at all among his followers before his death, should so soon afterwards be found taking a leading place among them?"[5] This question has usually been answered, as Bruce does, by citing the resurrection appearance to James, which, it is believed, resulted in a sudden, dramatic conversion experience similar to the one that changed Paul from a persecutor of Christianity into its most ardent spokesman when Christ appeared to him. This solution reasonably claims that the empty tomb and the subsequent resurrection appearances had the same galvanizing effect on James

and Jesus' family that it did on the apostles, but it raises other questions: Since we are told by Paul that Jesus' other brothers became Christian evangelists, are we to suppose that they *all* received resurrection appearances? Or was the rest of the family converted by the witness of James? Or is there, perhaps, another answer?

The two primary scholars who have done in-depth research into Jesus' family, John Painter and Richard Bauckham, have put forth another answer that is as surprising as it is sensible: Perhaps Jesus' family was never opposed to his ministry in the first place. There is ample evidence that Jesus' family were not, in fact, unbelievers. Painter and Bauckham propose that the gospel passages that have traditionally been understood as showing Jesus' family in opposition to his mission (including the seemingly damning Mark 3:21 and John 7:5) have been misunderstood and need not be read in a negative light. Painter in particular believes that Jesus' family was *never* opposed to his mission, that they were actually supporters of his ministry from its inception.

In point of fact, the *only* two passages in either the New Testament or any other early Christian literature that seem to show Jesus' family opposing his mission are the aforementioned Mark 3:21 and John 7:5. But Mark 3:21 in particular is quite convoluted in the original Greek and has engendered a number of quite varied translations. And John 7:2–5, except for the author's parenthetical comment, can also be interpreted in other ways. Yet these two brief passages have influenced our understanding of Jesus' relationship to his family far beyond their merit.

In the rest of this chapter, we will focus primarily on an investigation of Mark 3:20–21 and its parallels in the other synoptic gospels, Matthew and Luke.[*5] We will be going into some depth here, but the detail is vital for laying a firm foundation for the arguments that follow. Until we can get past Mark 3:21, we cannot begin to reimagine the character and role of James and the nature of early Christianity.

We will also examine the handful of other passages in the gospels that make mention of Jesus' family for the light they can shed on the historical traditions that might lie behind Mark 3:20–21. Our goal will be to work our way back through what scholars refer to as the three stages of gospel formation: from *stage three* (the stories as we have them written in the pages of the gospels) back to *stage two* (the oral traditions that were in circulation before the gospels were written down, and which served as the basis for the written gospels) to *stage one*—the elusive holy grail of historical Jesus studies: the actual historical events that gave rise to both the oral tradition and the later written accounts. Such work requires a thorough investigation; we will need to rigorously process a mass of evidence with the eye of a forensic scientist searching for clues at the scene of a crime.

THE FAMILY ACCORDING TO MARK

Almost all scholars today agree that Mark is the earliest gospel, composed about 70 C.E., and that the authors of Matthew and Luke used it as a blueprint in composing their own gospels. To begin our investigation, let us take a look at Mark 3:20–21 in its immediate context. As any beginning Bible student is taught, it can be dangerous to pull individual Bible verses out of their context in support of an argument. Mark 3:20–21 is a classic example. Let us first examine the entire *pericope*[*6] of Mark 3:20–35 as translated in the popular Revised Standard Version (second edition):

> Then he [Jesus] went home; 20 and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21 And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for people were saying, "He is beside himself." 22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." 23 And he called them to him, and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up

against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. 27 But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house.

28 "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—30 for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

31 And his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside they sent to him and called him. 32 And a crowd was sitting about him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, asking for you." 33 And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" 34 And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother."

First, it is interesting that there is an ancient variation of this passage, known as the "Western text" by scholars, which makes a subtle but striking change to verse 21. Instead of reading "when his family heard it," the Western text reads, "When *the scribes and the others* heard about him." It would seem obvious here that someone intentionally "monkeyed" with this text.[*7] The prime suspect would be a devout ancient copyist who meant no harm, but substituted the words "the scribes and others" for "his family" in an attempt to cope with the embarrassment of Jesus' own family taking action against him because they think he's insane.

The variation found in the Western text is not the only attempt that has been made to relieve the discomfort that this passage causes. With the voluminous number of Bible translations produced in the past few decades, Mark 3:20–21 has seen some other significant variations in its translation. Even the Revised Standard Version, the favorite of Protestants for over a hundred years, significantly altered its translation of verse 21 between editions,

greatly impacting the interpretation of this passage. The second edition is quoted above. The first reads (italics mine):

> And when *his friends* heard it, they went out to seize him, for *they* said, “He is beside himself.”

The earlier RSV translation followed the lead of the King James Version, which translates verse 21 thus:

> And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.

Obviously, these translations do not shed any negative light on Jesus’ family. Rather, the opposition comes from “his friends” (whoever they might be; obviously, they could include Jesus’ family, but this would be stretching the interpretation), and it is these friends who say Jesus is “beside himself,” which is a bit more polite than saying Jesus was “out of his mind.”

Before examining the reasons for these significant changes in translation, let us look at how some other important translations have handled this delicate passage (italics again mine):

New Revised Standard Version (a mainline[*8] ecumenical translation):

> When *his family* heard it, they went out to restrain him, for *people* were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.”

New International Version (an evangelical Protestant translation):

> When *his family* heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for *they* said, “He is out of his mind.”

The Anchor Bible (a mainline ecumenical commentary):

> On hearing of this, his family set out to take charge of him, for people were saying that he was out of his mind.

Word Biblical Commentary (an evangelical Protestant commentary):

> When *his people* heard, they set out to take him into their custody. For *they* said, “He was out of his mind.”

The New American Bible (a Roman Catholic translation):

> When *his relatives* heard of this they set out to seize him, for *they* said, “He is out of his mind.”

The Scholar’s Version (a liberal secular translation):

> When his relatives heard about it, they came to get him. (You see, they thought he was out of his mind).

Obviously, these variations in translation allow for significantly different interpretations of this critical passage. Whether it is Jesus’ family or the crowd or “people” who are saying he is “beside himself” or “out of his mind” or “crazy,” and whether it was his family or his friends or his “people” who came to “seize him” or “restrain him” or “get him under control”—these details significantly affect our understanding of this passage.

To fully understand how these variations are possible, it is necessary to engage in the somewhat unpleasant task of dissecting the original Greek in which this passage was written. Here is how the all-important verse 21 looks in the original Greek:

καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ παρ᾽ αὐτοῦ ἐξῆλθον κρατῆσαι αὐτόν· ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη.

If this is “all Greek to you,” here is a transliteration from Greek characters into English characters:

> *Kai akousantes hoi par autou exelthon kratesai auton; elegon gar hoti exeste.*

A literal, word-for-word translation is:

Kai akousantes	*hoi par autou*	*exelthon*	*kratesai auton;*
And hearing [it],	the ones with him	went forth	to seize him;
elegon gar	*hoti exeste.*		
for they said	that he is beside himself.		

There are essentially two main issues of translation here that bear significantly on the interpretation of this passage and that have shown up in variant ways in English:

1. Is *hoi par autou* (the ones with him) best translated as "his family," or "his friends," or "his people"?
2. Who is the "they" who say that he is "beside himself"? Is it people in general, or was it his family or his friends?

How these translation decisions are made ultimately depends on a given passage's context, as I will explain in a moment. Thus, translations of this critical verse are more exactly *interpretations* based on the verse's surrounding text rather than exact word-for-word translations. But before moving on to investigate the surrounding context of this verse, let us first place under the microscope the extremely critical translation of *hoi par autou*, literally, "the [ones] with him," or "the [ones] from him." The mother of all Greek reference books, Walter Bauer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, tells us that this phrase, "nearly always . . . denotes a person, and indicates that something proceeds from this person . . . *from (the side of)*."[6] Specifically referring to its use in Mark 3:21, the lexicon states that, "The [Greek] also uses this expression to denote others who are intimately connected with someone, e.g. *family, relatives*."[7] About this matter, the Anchor Bible commentary states:

> The Greek phrase covers all manner of meanings, from "envoys" and "adherents" to "neighbors and family." The sense is correctly conveyed by the Vulgate [the Latin translation] *sui* (his own). The

> reference is to immediate family, and not to disciples, still less to critics.[8]

But how does one make the jump from a phrase that at face value literally means "the ones with him" to "his own," implying "immediate family," as the Anchor Bible insists? And not only the Anchor Bible. "His family" has become so accepted that only older translations such as the King James and the first edition of the Revised Standard Version say "his friends." One modern translation, the *Word Biblical Commentary,* does vary, translating *hoi par autou* as "his people." But even this translator, Robert Guelich, accepts that "family" is implied. In his commentary, Guelich states:

> "His people" renders an ambiguous Greek construction . . . which generally means "envoys" or "adherents" but *on occasion* can mean "relatives". . . *Mark 3:31 makes clear that Jesus' "family" is meant.*[9] (italics mine)

Here Guelich reveals that the reason most translators favor rendering *hoi par autou* in verse 21 as "his family," even though it is a less common usage, is *the passage's relationship to* Mark 3:31—"And his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside they sent to him and called him." But quite a jump is being made here. Note well that the translation of the phrase in verse 21 is being decided based on another statement that comes *ten verses later*. In the *New International Commentary*, William L. Lane elaborates on this link:

> Because the expression is clearly colloquial it is difficult to be certain of its exact nuance. The translation "his friends" or "associates" is adopted by the AV [Authorized Version, better known as the King James] . . . and is supported by C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* . . . Papyri support for the rendering "friends," "neighbors," "associates" is not lacking . . . *[T]he context would seem to demand that the family of Jesus is in view*. . . . It is natural . . . to find *in Ch. 3:31–*

> *35* the proper sequel to Ch. 3:20 . . . [T]he group of people described colloquially in verse 21 *is further defined by verse 31* as including Jesus' mother and his brothers.[10] (italics mine)

Lane's comments clarify that the critical decision to translate *hoi par autou* as "his family" is driven by the context provided by verse 31: "And his mother and his brothers came . . ." But if Jesus' mother and brothers only arrive on the scene in verse 31, where is the justification in translating verse 21 as "his family"? The older English translations such as the King James and the RSV did not, although it could be argued that the translators of the King James were perhaps hesitant to cast the family in a bad light (as we saw with the ancient Western text) and the RSV simply followed suit.

There is, however, another way of looking at this passage that does not negatively reflect on the family. In his 1972 article (bearing the wonderfully right-to-the-point title "Mark 3:21—Was Jesus Out of His Mind?") in the prestigious journal *New Testament Studies,* Henry Wansbrough offered the following alternative:

> The Jerusalem Bible translates Mark iii.21 "When his relatives heard of this, they set out to take charge of him, convinced he was out of his mind." This way of construing the verse goes back at least as far as the Vulgate . . . and in its general lines seems to be accepted without question by all modern commentators. Nevertheless, it appears to me to be at least disputable and probably wrong. The understood subject of exeste [out of his mind or crazy] is not Jesus but ho ochlos [the crowd].[11]

Making this switch, Wansbrough renders the translation thus: "When they heard it [the crowd], his followers went to calm it down, for they said it was out of control with enthusiasm."[12]

Wansbrough's proposal led to a lively debate in the pages of *New Testament Studies* in the early 1970s. In a follow-up article, Ernest Best pointed out that Wansbrough's understanding was not new, but went back to a view that was

> originally advanced by G. Hartmann in 1913 which dissociates [verses 20–21] from vv. 31–35. They argue that: (a) vv. 31–35 do not take up the theme of v. 21, for the family of Jesus in vv. 31–35 is not actively hostile to him in v. 21; (b) [*exeste*] does not normally refer to madness and in Mark always carries the connotation "wonder, amazement"; (c) [*hoi par autou*] has usually a wider meaning than "family, kinsmen" . . . They therefore take [*hoi par autou*] to refer to the disciples who are with Jesus in the house and who go out [*exelthon*] to the crowd [*auton*] to curb its enthusiasm for they (the disciples) were saying that the crowd was amazed.[13]

As Best notes, Wansbrough and others are only able to hold that *hoi par autou* does *not* refer to family by dissociating verses 20–21 from verses 31–35. Again we see that it is the context of verses 31–35 that forces the decision of how to translate *hoi par autou.*

Around the time of this debate, an ecumenical task force composed of Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars produced the landmark work in Protestant-Catholic understanding, *Mary in the New Testament.* In considering the implications for Jesus' mother in Mark 3:20–21, they concluded that while the majority of scholars are probably correct in translating *hoi par autou* as "his family," what we are reading in this passage only represents, ". . . Mark's *own interpretation* of the attitude of Jesus toward his physical family"[14] (italics mine).

In point of fact, Mark may have had a motive for intentionally casting Jesus' family in a bad light, an issue we will discuss in the next section, but even if this is the case, the gospel is still no closer to historical fact than stage three—Mark's interpretation of events. The deeper question we want to address in our investigation is whether any animosity between Jesus and his family existed in the second-stage traditions that lie behind Mark's written account. To answer this question, we now examine the context of the disputed passage.

The pericope found in Mark 3:20–35 is a classic example of what scholars call Mark's "sandwich technique," where, quite often in his gospel, Mark places filler material in between two associated episodes in order to connect them. The following outline of Mark 3:20–35 illustrates how Mark has done this:

Introduction: A crowd assembles at the house—Jesus can't eat (verse 20)

(A) Jesus' "own" set out to seize him (verse 21)
21a: "His own" hear of his activity and set out to seize him 21b: Their reason: "He is beside himself"

(B) The dialogue between Jesus and the Jerusalem scribes (verses 22–30)
22a: The first charge of the scribes: "He is possessed by Beelzebul."
22b: The second charge: "By the prince of demons he casts out demons."
23–27: Jesus replies to the second charge
28–30: Jesus replies to the first charge

(A^1) Jesus' mother and brothers arrive and ask for him, resulting in Jesus' pronouncement of who his "real" family is (verses 31–35)

Here we can graphically see the three basic units that make up Mark's "sandwich." Many scholars believe that this passage is a combination of earlier traditional stories that were in circulation. Robert Guelich notes:

> 3:20–35 consists of a collection of originally discrete traditions. That leaves us with the questions about when these traditions were combined and what role, if any, did the evangelist [Mark] have in bringing together and modifying the material.[15]

Guelich concludes that the story of Jesus' family (3:20–21 and 31–35) was originally a single unit into which the controversy with

the scribes was interjected by Mark.[16] Why would Mark do this? Many scholars believe it was expressly for the purpose of subtly casting a shadow upon the family. Interposing the scribes' accusation that Jesus was in league with Satan between the two references to his family could be Mark's subtle way of making the point that Jesus' family was no better than the scribes in their opposition to Jesus.

Before investigating Mark's possible motives for such a startling act of misrepresentation, let me first demonstrate that there is other evidence of Mark intentionally arranging his narrative for the purpose of denigrating Jesus' family. To do so, we must step back and look at the big picture—the larger context into which Mark has placed 3:20–35. Verses 20–35 follow immediately upon the famous story of Jesus choosing the twelve apostles (3:13–19), a passage that is the first part of an even bigger "sandwich" (which scholars call an *inclusio)* that is completed with the sending forth of the apostles in 6:7–13. Looked at from this distance, the sequence of narrated events reveals a pattern that provides a clue to Mark's motive. Mark places an incident involving Jesus' family just prior to the sending of the Twelve: the rejection of Jesus by the people of his hometown (6:1–6). Here is the larger pattern:

(A) Choosing of the Twelve (3:13–19)

(B) Family controversy (3:20–35, discussed above)

(C) Chapters 4 and 5—The Parable of the Seeds and Healing Stories (the "filler")

(B^1) Family controversy (6:1–6, the people of Nazareth reject Jesus)

(A^1) Sending of the Twelve (6:6–13)

This larger pattern reinforces the smaller one we saw in 3:20–35. John Painter feels that the crucial verses, 3:20–21, are a "bridging summary" into the next pericope,[17] and the fact that verses 20–21 follow immediately upon the choosing of the Twelve means that *hoi par autou* refers to the *apostles,* and not Jesus' family. This seems quite logical. While most commentators look ahead to verses 31–35

for the clue to how to interpret *hoi par autou,* it makes far more sense to look at the immediately preceding verses for the context rather than looking ahead ten verses. Painter does not believe that verses 20–21 are in any way linked to 31–35:

> It is asking too much of the reader to recognize the vague expression in 3:21 as a reference to the family members who are not specifically mentioned until 3:31. If the *disciples* are in view in 3:20–21, the narrative continues their presence with Jesus from 3:13–19. This reading seems more obvious.[18] (italics mine)

In Painter's interpretation, it is the *disciples* who question Jesus' sanity, not his family. This makes significantly more sense. But, as we saw with the obviously matching continental shorelines that so many were able to ignore, the obvious is not always easily recognized.

Further support for Painter's theory is found in the well-known fact that Mark consistently portrays the apostles as quite human and quite fallible—at times dense and uncomprehending, at times cowardly, at times egotistical. Many scholars conclude that Mark had negative feelings toward the Twelve, as we will discuss shortly. So it is indeed quite probable, as Painter proposes, that it is the *apostles* whom Mark intended to be understood by *hoi par autou; they* are the ones who, as so often in Mark, misunderstand and question Jesus. Painter thinks that there are in fact *four* different groups that fall under Mark's stinging critique in verses 20–35: first the disciples, then the crowd, then the scribes, and finally Jesus' family (but in verses 31–35, *not* in 20–21). *All* misunderstand Jesus.

However we interpret *hoi par autou* in verse 20 (as family, friends, or disciples), Jesus *does* contrast his family with the disciples in Mark 3:31–35. But if we could imagine reading verses 31–35 without having any prior knowledge of verses 20–21, there is really nothing derogatory in Jesus' words. Jesus simply says that those who listen to him are his brothers and sisters, just as much as his real brothers and sisters. This is apparently the way that both

Matthew and Luke interpreted this passage when they adapted it for use in their own gospels. Comparing the pertinent passages in Mark to parallel passages in Matthew and Luke uncovers telling differences.[*9] The most obvious difference between the three synoptics is that Matthew and Luke have *no* parallels to verses 20–21—they are unique to Mark! There are parallels to the Beelzebul controversy with the scribes, but they are removed from the context in which they are found in Mark and placed elsewhere (see Matthew 12:35–37 and Luke 11:17–23). So our main clues in Matthew and Luke are found in the parallels to verses 31–35 in Mark:

Matthew 12:46–50

46 While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. 47 Someone told him, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak to you.” 48 But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” 49 And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Luke 8:19–21

19 Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him for the crowd. 20 And he was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.” 21 But he said to them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

It is immediately obvious that the absence of Mark’s verses 20–21 removes any negative motive for Jesus’ family seeking him. It is possible that Matthew and Luke deleted these verses because the potential implications made them nervous (as we saw it did the scribe who produced the Western Text). Neither Matthew nor Luke, however, shows any animosity between Jesus and his family. In their

versions, his family is simply seeking to see him. In fact, some scholars see a positive evaluation of Jesus' family in Luke because Jesus' statement, "my mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" could well include both Jesus' natural family and his disciples. Evangelical Christian scholar Ralph P. Martin, who wrote the commentary on the epistle of James for the Word Biblical Commentary, believes that Luke "openly associates the family of Jesus with potential discipleship. . . The inference is that Jesus' family—both spiritual and natural—are in Luke's sights here."[19] The widely respected Catholic New Testament scholar Joseph A. Fitzmyer, who wrote the commentary on Luke for the eminent *Anchor Bible* series, goes further. Fitzmyer believes that Luke "presents Jesus' mother and his brothers . . . as *model disciples*. They are the prime examples of those who listen to the word of God 'with a noble and generous mind' (8:15)"[20] (italics mine). Fitzmyer appeals to a literal translation of the Greek for support: "The phrase is actually . . . '(as for) my mother and brothers, *they* are the ones who listen.' So runs the literal translation of Luke's Greek, other attempts to interpret these words not withstanding." So not only do Matthew and Luke soften Mark's hostile stance toward Jesus' family, but Luke even portrays them positively.

This reappraisal by Matthew and Luke of Mark's seemingly negative understanding of Jesus' family is also in evidence in one other passage involving Jesus' family—the famous story of Jesus' first return to his hometown after becoming a celebrated figure throughout Galilee. The following are the parallel accounts of the reaction of Jesus' former neighbors when he returns home for the first time:

Mark 6:1–4

> He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2 On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by

his hands! 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. 4 Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house."

Matthew 13:54–58

54 He came to his hometown and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? 55 Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 And are not all his sisters with us? Where did this man get all this?" 57 And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor except in their own country and in their own house."

Luke 4:22–24

22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" 23 He said to them, "Doubtless you will tell me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here in your hometown the things that we have heard you did in Capernaum.'" 24 And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown."

These accounts are fascinating, for they report the purported words of those people who knew Jesus and his family ever since Jesus was a child. These are also the only accounts in the gospels where Jesus' brothers are named.[*10] It is said that familiarity breeds contempt, which was apparently the case here, for this is where Jesus utters his famous saying, "Prophets are not without honor except in their own . . ." Exactly where and among whom a prophet

is without honor depends on whether we read Mark, Matthew, or Luke's version. Mark says: ". . . in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." Tellingly, Matthew drops "hometown" and "kin" and says: ". . . in their own country and in their own house." Luke simply says: ". . . in the prophet's hometown."

The wording of Luke's account is so different from Mark's and Matthew's that some scholars think Luke is not relying on Mark for this information, but on a separate tradition he had at his disposal, which scholars call the special "L source." Once again, as we move from Mark to Mathew to Luke, a progressive softening of Mark's antifamily stance is plainly seen. And in *none* of the three gospels is Jesus' family identified outright as taking offense at him—it is only the townspeople who do so.

Once again, the most negative representation of the family is in Mark, where Jesus specifically says prophets are without honor "among their own kin, and in their own house." While the widely accepted theory of Markan priority sees Matthew and Luke as making alterations to Mark, it also needs to be kept in mind that Mark made alterations to the traditional material on which he based his gospel. So it is also possible that Matthew and Luke did *not* delete Mark's reference to kin, but that Mark *added* it to the tradition for the intentional purpose of showing that Jesus' family, like the apostles and everyone else in his gospel, misunderstood Jesus. In the next verses (5–6), Mark immediately adds: "And he could do no deeds of power there . . . And he was amazed at their unbelief." The point is clear: those who knew Jesus best—the people of his hometown, his friends and neighbors, and even his family—did not believe in him.

Now is a good time for a recap of where our investigation has thus far led us. To sum up our findings to this point, we have before us three possibilities:

1. Jesus' family really was in opposition to him.
2. Jesus' family was not in opposition to him—the main source for concluding an antagonistic relationship, Mark 3:20–21, has been

misinterpreted.

3. Jesus' family was not in opposition to him, but Mark deliberately painted them in this light for reasons yet to be uncovered.

Thus far, we have seen a lot of evidence favoring the latter two possibilities, each of which challenges received wisdom in both academia and the church. Yet as compelling as the evidence may be, it does not by itself actually overturn the traditional paradigm. To do that, more supporting evidence will be needed. Further evidence can be found in the fourth gospel—the Gospel According to John. While John does not report any parallel to the story of Jesus' family that we have been examining, the gospel does present a unique and fascinating encounter between Jesus and his brothers following the story of the wedding banquet at Cana, to which we now turn.

THE FAMILY ACCORDING TO JOHN

In John we find the only evidence anywhere in the gospels that Jesus' family may have been a part of his following *during his ministry.* The first reference to Jesus' family in John is in the famous story of the wedding banquet at Cana (John 2:1–12), where Jesus, at his mother's urging, performs his first miracle by turning the water in six vast stone water jars (John tells us each contained twenty to thirty gallons) into wine, thus saving a lavish wedding banquet from ruin. Not only is Mary the protagonist in this story, but she could be said to inaugurate Jesus' ministry by impelling him to perform his first miracle. What is most significant for our purposes is that Mary does not seem at all skeptical of Jesus here.

The seemingly innocuous transition statement that follows upon the banquet scene has even more interesting implications: "After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days" (2:12). This is the first mention of Jesus' brothers in John, yet they are introduced in a remarkably nonchalant way, reminiscent of James's introduction in Acts and Galatians. When one stops to think about it, John's seemingly offhand transition actually speaks volumes about Jesus'

brothers. John Painter, in his major study *Just James*, perceptively articulates the significance of this deceptively simple verse:

> The mention of the brothers in 2:12 is completely gratuitous. They are mentioned at neither the Cana wedding nor the subsequent events in the Temple. Had the evangelist freely composed 2:12, those mentioned in the linking verse might be expected to be present in the preceding and succeeding incidents. What 2:12 does is to create the impression that the brothers were an essential part of the following of Jesus.[21] (italics mine)

Painter would likely be more hesitant to come to such a startling conclusion if 2:12 were the only such evidence that Jesus' family was part of his ministry, but it is not. If Painter's surmise is correct, we may now be starting to hit some historical bedrock—the elusive first-stage history that is the ultimate goal of historical Jesus scholarship.

Another piece of evidence pointing in this direction is, surprisingly, the seemingly damning account of Jesus' brothers in John 7:1–5:

> After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. 2 Now the Jewish festival of booths was near. 3 So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; 4 for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." 5 (For not even his brothers believed in him.)

If we read between the lines here, we are once again left with the impression (despite both the brothers' seemingly sarcastic challenge to Jesus and John's comment on the brothers' unbelief) that Jesus' brothers were regularly in his company, and certainly not estranged from him. To resolve the seeming contradiction between the subtext

(that the brothers were commonly with Jesus) and the overt message (that they did not believe in him) of verse 5, we can turn to John Painter:

> [H]ow are we to take the statement that "his brothers did not believe in him?" From [John's] perspective, belief prior to the resurrection/ glorification of Jesus is thought to be suspect, so that right at the end of his farewell discourses Jesus challenges the affirmation of belief by the disciples, "Do you now believe?" (16:31) . . . If Jesus puts the belief of the disciples in question at this point, we should hesitate before concluding that the narrator's comment in 7:5 indicates that the brothers were total unbelievers.[22]

Painter is here pointing to a well-known theme in John's gospel: Everyone, including the apostles (and particularly Peter), misunderstands Jesus and the nature of his messianic mission. In John's gospel, *no one* truly believes in Jesus until after the resurrection when all is made clear. Therefore, it may be less accurate to say that John singles Jesus' brothers out when he accuses them of unbelief than to say that he comments on them to make the point that *even* Jesus' brothers—along with everyone else—did not have true belief. John's comment may not at all imply that Jesus' brothers were opposed to his ministry, and it does not at all rule out the possibility that, as Painter puts it, "the brothers were an essential part of the following of Jesus."

At first glance, one might get the impression from John 7:3–4 that Jesus' brothers are being sarcastic or are perhaps taunting Jesus, but that idea is also garnered from John's parenthetical comment in verse 5 (and perhaps also from a subliminal carryover of the traditional understanding of Mark 3:21). If we can try to erase John 7:5 and Mark 3:21 from our memory, there really is nothing at all sinister or even sarcastic in the brothers' statements in verses 3 and 4. In fact, it could be argued that they are actually supporting Jesus and urging him on to more fully reveal himself to his disciples in Judea.

These possibilities become even more plausible when we consider that except for the single aside in 7:5 (which, moreover, could be a later editor's addition to the original text), John's gospel is more pro-family than the three synoptic gospels. In addition to the key role that Jesus' mother plays in inaugurating his ministry, Mary is also present at the cross (with at least one other female relative—Mary of Clopas, Jesus' aunt), and one of Jesus' last acts is to entrust her care to the "Beloved Disciple." John Painter concludes of the evidence in John:

> Had the presence of the brothers with Jesus during his ministry not been traditional, they would have played no part in the gospel narrative. Even in the evangelist's interpretation of their role, they are portrayed as "fallible followers" rather than as outright unbelievers. In this their portrayal does not differ greatly from that of the disciples . . .
>
> The overall effect . . . is to lead the reader to the conclusion that the mother and brothers of Jesus were among his intimate supporters.[23]

By now the reader should begin to see a clear pattern emerging. When one assesses *all* of the evidence in the gospels, on balance *there is more evidence to support a positive role for Jesus' family in his ministry than a negative one*. This is one of the first firm conclusions to which the evidence all points. We can now discard the notion that Jesus' family really was in opposition to him. Based solely on the evidence we have thus far, we can conclude that Jesus' family were not opponents, but followers of his ministry.

As for Mark 3:21, we are now left to decide between the other two possibilities: either 3:21 does *not* refer to Jesus' family or it does, and Mark intentionally composed the verse to cast the family in a bad light. If the latter, we may reasonably ask why Mark would pursue such a goal. We turn now to some contemporary scholarly theories that attempt to account for Mark's motives.

ANALYZING MARK'S AGENDA

A growing trend among scholars (that has practically reached a consensus) understands Mark as a gospel with a hidden agenda. Two of today's leading historical Jesus scholars, John Dominic Crossan and Burton Mack, see Mark as writing polemically against the leadership of the mother church in Jerusalem, specifically, the role played in the Jerusalem church by Jesus' apostles and his family.[24] This rather startling idea goes back to a theory first promulgated in the early 1970s by Theodore Weeden in his book *Mark—Traditions in Conflict* (based on his doctoral dissertation, "The Heresy That Necessitated Mark's Gospel"). Weeden was one of the first to notice a pattern in Mark which scholars up to that point had failed to see—that Mark portrays the disciples, without exception, negatively:

> What . . . scholars have refused to consider is the possibility that these Markan episodes in which the disciples are placed in such an unfavorable light may be more than just the result of the passing on of tradition or the consequence of the development of a theological motif . . . They have failed to consider seriously the possibility that the evangelist might be attacking the disciples intentionally, for whatever reason.[25]

Weeden noted that the groundwork for this revolutionary theory was laid in the early 1960s by two scholars named Johannes Schreiber and Joseph Tyson, both of whom argued that:

> Mark's portrayal of the disciples must be seen as a literary device in the service of a polemic against a conservative Jewish Christian group in Palestine which placed no positive meaning in Jesus' death, held to the long-established Jewish practices, and rejected the necessity of the gentile mission.[26]

The "conservative Jewish Christian group" that Weeden refers to as being the object of Mark's polemic is the same group that Paul rails against in many of his letters. Christian scholars have traditionally used the rather anti-Semitic term "Judaizers" to describe this group

—followers of Jesus who wanted to maintain their Judaism by continuing to adhere to the Torah, and who were in opposition to Paul's mission to the Gentiles (at least in the way in which Paul wanted to carry it out). In later chapters we shall examine rather astounding evidence that this Jewish Christian group against whom Mark was contending (in the late 60s C.E.) was actually the second generation leadership of the Jerusalem church, and claimed the support of James and the apostles for their teachings and practices.

Scholars today realize that early Christianity was by no means homogeneous; there were many competing factions within the early church, each holding different interpretations of Jesus. Tensions and disagreements, especially over the nature of Jesus (i.e., whether he was human or divine) built up over the years and were eventually resolved (certainly not to everyone's satisfaction) at the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. Those who disagreed with the majority vote at Nicaea were forever afterward declared to be heretics.

These disagreements between the various Christian communities in the fourth century had their roots already among the earliest Christian communities of the first century, especially in the rival interpretations of Jesus held by the earliest Jewish Christian and Gentile Christian communities. As noted earlier, the German scholar F. C. Baur was the first to recognize that all was not peaceful between Paul and the Jerusalem church. After Baur, many scholars began to reread the New Testament in the light of this friction, and after falling out of favor for more than a century, there is a strong resurgence of Baur's ideas today. British scholar Micheal Goulder, for example, in his recent book *St. Paul versus St. Peter: A Tale of Two Missions*, examines the tendencies of the gospel writers in light of the friction between the Jewish Christian community centered in Jerusalem and the Gentile Christian communities centered on Paul's teachings. Goulder summarizes:

> Mark looks like a Pauline, hostile toward Jesus' family who ran the Jerusalem mission in his time, ambivalent about [the disciples], but down on their followers if they started talking about

> authority. Matthew steadily exonerates both groups, and seems if anything sympathetic to the Jerusalem leadership. Luke is an irenic character, friendly to both sides. As for John, he is an ultra-Pauline. . . . He tells us that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him (the fundamental sin in the Fourth Gospel); they tried to hustle Jesus to go to Jerusalem before his time . . .[27]

Goulder notes that Matthew and Luke remove the animosity toward the family that is present in Mark's gospel, and offers the following reason why:

> Matthew and Luke seem to have a tendency to exonerate Jesus' family; and we could explain this by the view that they were much more sympathetic to the Jerusalem church than Mark was. In the case of Luke, we really know this was so, because we have a second book Luke wrote, the Acts of the Apostles . . . Peter (and the other eleven) are the heroes in chs 1–12, and Paul is the hero in chs 13–28; and in ch 15, when the issue of Gentiles keeping the Law is discussed, everyone agrees with Paul, and the Gentiles are not made to observe it. So we know that Luke is a liberal Pauline . . . but he wants the church united and the two missions reconciled, and he will not tell stories in which Jesus' family come out badly.[28]

The possibility of animosity and rivalry among the early Christians can come as a shock to average Christians today, most of whom imagine a congenial picture of the early church, with Jesus' disciples living harmoniously in Christian love. In reality, it was simply not so, and we shall begin to see the actual history of muckraking, mudslinging, and backstabbing in the next chapter.

In fairness, it should be pointed out that some scholars caution against making so much of the gospel writers' polemical agendas that we fail to consider other reasons for the attitudes that emerge in their writing. Ernest Best, for example, has stated that "it seems that too much [New Testament] scholarship today begins with the question, 'Against whom is this written?'" Best thinks that Mark may

have drawn a picture of the hostility of Jesus' family not for the purpose of polemicizing against them, but for the purpose of encouraging Christians who were experiencing opposition from their own families because of becoming Christians:

> Jesus is depicted as alienated from his family . . . Such an alienation from family must have been the experience of many of Mark's community . . . their families will have thought them out of their minds for becoming Christians. The family of Jesus is thus used homiletically [for teaching purposes]. Historically such opposition may have been their attitude—at any rate Mark has tradition to this effect—but he is not interested . . . in how it could be used to tarnish a James-party, but instead in how his readers can be encouraged.[29]

As far as there being any actual animosity between Jesus and his family, note well that Best will only go so far as to say that Mark "has tradition to this effect." As we have emphasized, what was in the oral, or second-stage, tradition was not necessarily in the actual first-stage history. John Dominic Crossan believes that while tension between Jesus and his family may have been in the tradition that came down to Mark, Mark intensifies that animosity for polemical purposes:

> Even if there was some pre-Markan evidence of tension between Jesus and his relatives in the tradition . . . it is Mark himself who: (i) equated their attempt to restrain Jesus as one insane with the accusation of the Jerusalem scribes that he was possessed . . . and (ii) mentioned the relatives by name and then added that these also did not honor him [6:1–6].[30]

Crossan believes that Mark took this bold step because he was fighting on a "double front," both against Judaizing "heretics" within the Markan community who claimed the support of Jesus' family for their views (Weeden's theory), and also "in whole or in part, against the jurisdictional and doctrinal hegemony of the Jerusalem church,"

which, as we shall in the next chapter, was led by James. Crossan presents the following evidence:

> [T]he villains of Markan theology are not just the disciples in general but the inner three, Peter, James [Jesus' brother], and John in particular . . . To focus the failure of the disciples in general on the three in particular and most especially on Peter can hardly be derived merely from a desire to personify the heretics within the Markan community. It seems rather to point towards the Jerusalem mother-church where the importance of Peter, on the one hand, and of an inner three, on the other, is witnessed to by a text such as Gal. ii 7–10 . . .
>
> Secondly, the animosity of Mark to the relatives of Jesus points likewise against the Jerusalem church because it is there that James, the brother of the Lord, becomes important . . . The polemic against the disciples and the polemic against the relatives intersect as a polemic against the jurisdictional hegemony of the Jerusalem mother-church.

In other words, by the time Mark was writing in the late 60s, the Gentile churches outside of Israel were beginning to resent the authority wielded by Jerusalem (where James and the apostles were leaders), thus providing the motive for Mark's antifamily stance and his polemics against the apostles.

So we now have a motive that could account for Mark's unfavorable portrayal of Jesus' family in 3:21. Of course, that motive —no matter how clearly expressed elsewhere—may not apply to the critical understanding of 3:21 if *hoi par autou* was not intended by Mark to refer to Jesus' family. On this matter, then, we are still faced with making a decision between the two alternative possibilities enumerated earlier: either Mark has intentionally taken a swipe at Jesus' family in 3:21 or Mark never meant to imply Jesus' family with his use of the phrase *hoi par autou.* Although the evidence we saw strongly favors the latter theory, a definitive determination remains elusive. Fortunately for our concerns, either theory is acceptable because neither one is any longer an obstacle to our first major

claim, that Jesus' family were followers of his ministry prior to the resurrection.

No matter what Mark's intention was in 3:21, it is highly unlikely that Jesus' family thought he was out of his mind and opposed his mission. The bottom line is that the well-attested evidence that Jesus' family were followers so soon after the crucifixion is hard to account for only by the attestation of a resurrection appearance to James which resulted in a sudden about-face. As one of the pioneer historical Jesus scholars, Johannes Weiss, observed a century ago, "there must accordingly have taken place a change in the attitude on the part of the brothers, sometime *before the appearance to James*"[31] (italics mine). Richard Bauckham, who has done as much research into Jesus' family as anyone, agrees:

> If James were in no sense a follower of Jesus until he met the risen Christ, this resurrection appearance would be comparable only to the appearance to Paul. It is more likely to imply that *James already belonged to the circle of the disciples of Jesus*.[32] (italics mine)

In other words, Jesus appeared to James after his resurrection not because James did *not* believe, but precisely because he *did.* Both Weiss and Bauckham, however, still work under the assumption of the old paradigm that Jesus' family was initially opposed to his mission, but at some point changed their minds and became supporters.

Our work in this chapter isn't paradigm-shattering in itself, yet by reevaluating the relationship between Jesus and his family as it is portrayed in the New Testament, we have changed a small part of the picture that most biblical scholars of the past two millennia have taken for truth and prepared the way for a more extensive revision of how we understand one of the central characters in the New Testament and the nature of early Christianity itself. As persuasive as the textual evidence presented in this chapter has been, these are not conclusions to be taken on textual evidence alone.

Therefore, we shall now seek to uncover more supporting evidence from a historical analysis of the early Christian church. But before moving ahead in our investigation, let us pause to take stock of where the evidence has led us thus far.

THE FAITH OF THE FAMILY

To conclude this initial stage of our investigation into how James and the family of Jesus are portrayed in the gospels, let us summarize our findings to this point:

1. Despite a lack of certainty about Mark's intent in the use of the term *hoi par autou* in 3:21, there is *nothing* in the gospels that *incontrovertibly* shows opposition to Jesus by his family during his ministry.
2. The two leading scholars who have done the most in-depth investigation on these matters—Painter and Bauckham—have arrived at essentially the same conclusion: that Jesus' mother and brothers were followers of his ministry some time *prior to the crucifixion.* Their matching conclusions are all the more significant because Painter and Bauckham are not theologically in the same camp. John Painter is a liberal, a disciple of Rudolph Bultmann, while Richard Bauckham is a more conservative Christian scholar.

As the more cautious of the the two, Bauckham is hesitant to say that the members of Jesus' family were disciples from the outset of his ministry, or even an "essential part" of his following, as Painter does. Let us hear the final piece of testimony on Jesus' family from Bauckham:

> From . . . the Gospels we may draw the following conclusions:
>
> (1) During his ministry Jesus' relationship with his family was not entirely smooth . . . At least for part of his ministry they were not among his followers.

(2) According to . . . the Markan . . . traditions Jesus expected renunciation of family relationships as part of the cost of discipleship . . . and it is not unreasonable to suppose that this was also the cost to himself of his own mission.

(3) At least by the time of his last visit to Jerusalem, Jesus' relatives —his mother, brothers, his uncle Clopas and his wife, and probably another aunt—had joined his followers.[33]

Personally, I think Bauckham's conservatism causes him to be a bit too circumspect here. He agrees with Painter that Jesus' family were followers before the crucifixion, and that the traditional account of James becoming a believer only after a resurrection appearance does not account for the data. Why, then, does Bauckham feel that they were not *always* part of Jesus' ministry? He believes that they became followers sometime *during* Jesus' ministry (which was at most one to three years). If Jesus' family had been skeptical of his mission early on, as Bauckham claims, we are still faced with question of what made them change their minds. Certainly not the resurrection, since it had not yet happened.

Such lingering questions make me agree with Painter. It is far more likely that Jesus' family had *always* been an "essential part" of his following. This conclusion makes the most sense out of all the evidence without leaving any lingering questions or loose ends. Such a conclusion would *not*, however, mean that Jesus' family were always in total agreement with him, even if, and perhaps especially if, they believed him to be the Messiah. If indeed Jesus' family were part of his ministry because they believed him to be the Messiah (a notion we shall address later), there would almost certainly have been areas of heated debate and disagreement, and perhaps it is this part of the historical tradition that Mark acquired. Disagreements between Jesus and his family would likely have arisen over some of the very same issues that aroused opposition from Jesus' detractors: Jesus' perceived flaunting of aspects of the Law, his associating with "sinners," and the very nature of messiahship itself and what that entailed (especially if, as many third-quest historical Jesus scholars

now believe, Jesus understood his mission to be that of a suffering Messiah, and not the traditional conquering Messiah of Jewish expectation).

This line of reasoning accounts for *all* of the data at our disposal. It not only explains the seemingly sudden post-crucifixion discipleship of the family (it *wasn't* sudden), but it also accounts for the presence in the tradition of some opposition between Jesus and his family without relying on theories of polemics (although polemics were also certainly involved to some extent). And if Mark and John *were* writing polemically, our theory is enhanced all the more.

To find further support for the new paradigm we are beginning to construct, let us now begin phase two of our investigation by focusing in on the Jerusalem church, starting with an examination of how James is portrayed in the book of Acts and in the letters of Paul.

2

THE NATURE OF THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

3

JAMES OF JERUSALEM: THE WITNESS OF LUKE AND PAUL

> *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.*
>
> ST. PAUL, GALATIANS 1:18–19 (RSV)

In this chapter we shall open a file on James's activity in Jerusalem as witnessed to by Luke in the book of Acts and by Paul in his letter to the Galatians. Because the historicity of the accounts in the book of Acts has been so contentious in modern scholarship, we shall rely on Galatians as our primary witness, with Acts used as ancillary testimony. This will place us on firmer historical ground: after all, Paul *was there*, his is an eyewitness account, whereas Acts is a later historian's attempt to piece together those same events. Nonetheless, so much historical information can be gleaned from Acts that we will treat it at great length.

Most scholars today believe that Galatians was written around the year 55 and Acts quite a bit later, somewhere between 85 and 90. This is not to say that Paul's account is always more accurate. Paul had his personal biases which may have both subtly and not-so-subtly influenced his account, perhaps especially in his heated arguments in Galatians. In this epistle, Paul is arguing against the teaching of some influential Jewish Christian leaders who have tried to convince the Gentile Christians in Galatia that they needed to be

circumcised and obey the Law of Moses in order to attain salvation. Paul's argument is heated, and his personal agenda will, of course, have to be taken into consideration when analyzing his text for its historical accuracy.

As is well known, however, Luke had his own agenda, which affected his portrayal of the development of the early church. Noted Roman Catholic historical Jesus scholar John Meier has nicely summed up the scholarly debate concerning the historicity of Luke's representation of the early church in Acts:

> The author of Acts . . . has a noted tendency to smooth over fierce battles in the early church. To what extent his peaceful vision molded his narrative and, indeed, to what extent he enjoyed reliable sources for early Christianity, is still disputed among Lukan scholars . . . [I]t can be said with a certain amount of truth that the majority of Germans . . . have proven more reserved towards the historical reliability of Acts than the British and Americans . . . Faced with this disagreement . . . we would do well to pursue a middle course in which Acts is neither dismissed lightly as pure theologizing nor accepted naively as pure history. Each text must be judged on its own merits and on available information from other sources.[1]

This is wise advice from a wise scholar, and Meier's balanced approach is the one that will be taken here.

Luke himself makes it clear in the opening of his gospel that he did not personally know Jesus and therefore relied on earlier written sources, which in turn were dependent on even earlier oral tradition. At the outset of his gospel, he states:

> Many writers have undertaken to draw up an account of the events that have happened . . . following the *traditions handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses* . . . And so I in my turn . . . as one who has gone over the whole course of these events in detail, have decided to write a connected narrative (Luke 1:1–3, NEB).

This is certainly how all of the gospels were written, and we need to remember that the earliest gospel, Mark, which was one of Luke's sources, was itself composed some thirty-five to forty years after Jesus' death, while Luke's gospel and Acts were written over fifty years after the crucifixion. The reason for the delay is that the early Christian community saw no need to commit its history to writing—Jesus was expected to return at any time. It was only after decades had elapsed and it became obvious that Jesus' return (referred to by scholars with the Greek term *Parousia*) would not happen as soon as expected, that the need to commit things to writing became necessary. In light of the long interval between the events themselves and Luke's writing (c. 85–90), it is fortunate that we have Paul's firsthand account (in Galatians 2) of one of the key sections in Acts that concerns James—the all-important Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15. (We should note, however, that whether these two passages refer to the same event is one of the most debated questions in New Testament studies.) The other key passage in Acts that involves James is the account of Paul's final visit to Jerusalem, which we cannot, unfortunately, weigh against a parallel account from Paul. Happily, this is one of the "we sections" of Acts—passages that were written in the first person and purport to be eyewitness reports.

Due to such complicating factors, sorting through the accounts of Luke and Paul in an attempt to uncover reliable historical evidence on James requires some careful analysis. So, with the foregoing caveats in mind, let us turn our keen attention to James's earliest days in Jerusalem.

JAMES IN JERUSALEM

As we have already seen, in the very first chapter of Acts we are told that immediately after Jesus' ascension the apostles remained together in Jerusalem, "constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers" (1:14). While he is not here mentioned by name, we can only assume that James, as the eldest brother of Jesus,

would have been with them. Paul can at least attest that James was present at the time of his first visit to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:19, quoted at the beginning of the chapter), an initial consultation with Peter and James that is generally dated anywhere from 34 to 38, within just a few years of the crucifixion, which is universally accepted as occurring sometime between 30 and 33. Obviously, though, Paul's meeting with James cannot corroborate that James was present in Jerusalem within weeks of the crucifixion. Passages from the gospels however, do imply the presence of Jesus' family. John 19:25 tells of the presence of Jesus' mother at the crucifixion, and while Luke does not explicitly place Mary at the crucifixion in his own gospel, he does leave room for her presence when he writes, "the women who had followed [Jesus] from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things" (23:49).

So while Luke's gospel says nothing about Jesus' family being in his company during his ministry, in Luke's sequel—the book of Acts—they are suddenly, and without explanation, in the company of the apostles immediately after the crucifixion. It could be conjectured that they came along with Jesus and the apostles to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem, for Luke attests that "every year [Jesus'] parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover" (2:41). Thus, there was a solid precedent for Jesus' family being in Jerusalem at the time of his crucifixion (which happened at Passover). They were obviously a devout Jewish family with the financial means to make the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem, something few were able to afford. And even if the family *had* been back in Galilee, news of Jesus' crucifixion would certainly have brought them hurriedly to Jerusalem. But all of this is speculation. It is much more plausible that the family was already there in Jerusalem with Jesus at the time of his arrest.

It is worth mentioning at this point that the historical Jesus scholar John Dominic Crossan has entertained some intriguing thoughts about the possibility of James having been in Jerusalem even *prior* to Jesus coming there in the final week of his life. In

Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, Crossan engages in a fascinating speculation:

> [H]ow long had [James] been in Jerusalem? We know for sure . . . that he was there by about 38 C.E., when Paul first met him. Did he come there only after the execution of Jesus, or *had he been there long before it?* I realize how tentative . . . this is, but much more explanation for James's presence and standing in Jerusalem needs to be given than is usually offered.[2]

Crossan admits that his suggestion is "terribly hypothetical," but bases his speculation on the high standing that James achieved in Jerusalem in a remarkably short period of time. From a logical standpoint, it is hard to believe that Jesus' apostles, who had been with him from the beginning, would have so quickly turned the reins of leadership over to James (his relationship to Jesus notwithstanding) if James had been at odds with Jesus and opposed to his mission. Crossan also bases his conjecture on the tumultuous reaction to the illegal execution of James, which, according to Josephus, aroused the ire of the leading Pharisees in Jerusalem.[*11] It is difficult to believe that James would have been accorded such respect by leading Pharisees if he had not been entrenched for quite some time in a prominent position in Jerusalem.

Before we get too far ahead of ourselves, however, let us return to the beginning of Acts. Here we need to keep in mind, as already mentioned, the possibility of Luke's own ideology coloring his narrative. This is summed up nicely in an article in the invaluable reference guide the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters:*

> Luke . . . had an apologetic purpose in mind in his presentation . . . [H]e sought to demonstrate . . . that Jerusalem had a central place in the divine plan. He begins his gospel in Jerusalem (Lk 1:5–23) and concludes at the same place (Lk 24:33–53). He begins Acts in Jerusalem as well (Acts 1:3–8) and patterns the spread of the gospel along the lines of the paradigm Jerusalem-Judea-Samaria-ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The centrality of

> Jerusalem for Luke is also seen in its being the place of the church's origin (Lk 24; Acts 1) . . . It is the place where key theological debates are settled (Acts 15) and from where decrees are promulgated (Acts 15:19–35). Yet all this is certainly not . . . a purely literary fiction but based on reality. From the available evidence, the fact is that Jerusalem was indeed the center and the mother church of the Christian movement.[3]

As this commentary makes clear, Luke's concern with Jerusalem is wont to override his concern for historical accuracy. It is telling that Luke is the only gospel that places Jesus' resurrection appearances in *Jerusalem* rather than Galilee! The rather notorious German liberal theologian, Gerd Lüdemann, who is as careful a historicist as any New Testament scholar, gives a sober and well-reasoned summary of Jerusalem's actual historical significance:

> Although the Acts account of the earliest beginnings of Christianity in Jerusalem is certainly incorrect, there can be no doubt that not long after the crucifixion of Jesus a considerable number of his followers, after having left the capital temporarily, established a church in Jerusalem which was of decisive importance for Christianity in and outside of Palestine up to the time of the Jewish War . . .
>
> The first resurrection appearances occurred in Galilee (Mark 16:7; Matt. 28:16ff.; John 21), where Jesus' disciples had returned—or rather, fled . . .
>
> Regarded historically . . . Peter reorganized the circle of the Twelve in Galilee and with them returned to Jerusalem. Thus with Peter as the leader the Twelve . . . assumed a position of leadership in the Jerusalem church.[4] (italics mine)

Lüdemann's conjecture that the apostles fled back to Galilee certainly makes sense in that, after the crucifixion, the disciples would have feared for their own lives and wanted to return to familiar territory as quickly as possible. Their equally hasty return to

Jerusalem also makes sense when one considers the galvanizing effect that the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances would have had on the disciples. Their belief in Jesus' imminent Parousia would have impelled them to return to Jerusalem, for that is where, according to Old Testament prophetic tradition, the Messiah would appear and the apocalyptic "Day of the Lord" would commence.[5]

Whether the itinerary of James was the same as that of the apostles is an open question at this point. As fearful as the disciples were for their own lives following Jesus' crucifixion, James, as the next of kin, would have had even more to fear. If Jesus was, as the gospels attest and as most historical Jesus scholars agree, crucified for the crime of treason against the Roman Empire (as Pilate's placard on the cross, reading "the King of the Jews," plainly declared), the Romans would indeed have cast a wary eye on James, whom, as Jesus' eldest brother, they would have expected to be next in line to succeed him. The Romans kept close vigilance on anyone who might be a potential threat to the peace of Rome—the sacred *Pax Romana.*

JAMES AS APOSTLE

As to the whereabouts of James, in addition to the collected records of Luke, we also have the invaluable eyewitness testimony of Paul. In fact, our earliest written evidence about James's presence in Jerusalem comes from Paul's letter to the Galatians, written about thirty years after the crucifixion. In the first chapter of that letter, Paul gives a brief, but invaluable, autobiographical summary of his activity subsequent to his conversion experience on the Damascus Road (generally dated 32–35). Here, Paul reflects on his first visit to Jerusalem, dating it three years after his conversion from persecutor of Christians to apostle to the Gentiles: "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas [Peter], and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:18–19, RSV). Here we have firm evidence that James was resident in Jerusalem by at least the mid-30s. Paul's statement also reveals that, *at least* by this time, James was a major

figure in Jerusalem. F. F. Bruce has commented on the import of Paul's account of seeing James: "This may point to James as the second most important man in the church; at any rate, he was someone whom it was important for Paul to see."[6] Or, as Oscar Cullmann succinctly puts it: "it was already impossible for a Christian believer to make a stay in Jerusalem without coming into contact with James."[7]

A crucial piece of evidence for James's standing is also to be found in Paul's turn of phrase in his seemingly off-the-cuff statement, "But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother." Note well that Paul bestows upon James the title *apostle.* Naturally, there are other ways to interpret this verse, such as the translation found in the New International Version: "I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother." This could be taken to mean that James was *not* an apostle, but the vast majority of scholars take Paul's statement at face value to mean that Paul considered James to be an apostle of the same merit as the Twelve. F. F. Bruce sums up the argument:

> Paul certainly indicates that he regarded James as an apostle. If we were compelled to understand his words otherwise, they could be construed differently—as though he meant, "I saw none of the other apostles, but I did see James the Lord's brother"—but this is a less natural construction . . . unlike Luke, Paul does not confine the designation "apostles" to the twelve.[8]

It is well known that Paul uses the term *apostle* for any eyewitness to the resurrected Christ, which is the basis of his defense to his critics for being able to apply the title to himself. In 1 Corinthians, Paul asks: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (9:1) That Paul would consider James an apostle in this sense (apart from the question of whether James was a follower prior to the resurrection) is attested to by Paul's listing of James as a witness to the resurrected Christ later in this same letter (1 Cor. 15:7).

A dissenting voice on this issue is that of conservative scholar Ralph P. Martin, who, in his commentary on the epistle of James, has this to say about how Paul viewed James:

> [Paul] recognized James as a leader who was prominent in the mother church. He appealed to James's authority as a witness of the resurrection, and claimed himself to be a member of that company. [But he] was reluctant to state plainly that James was, in Paul's own estimation, an apostle—according to what is perhaps the best conclusion we can reach on the ambiguous wording of 1 Cor 15:7.[9]

In support of his claim, Martin cites what he calls the "considered judgment" of New Testament scholar Walter Schmithals, whom he quotes:

> We can only conclude that [the] lack of clarity was intentional with Paul . . . Paul limits the assertion that he has seen no apostles besides Peter by leaving room for the possibility that one could, if need be, count James among the apostles—something he was not himself accustomed to doing.[10]

John Painter, however, strongly rebuts the interpretation of Martin and Schmithals, stating that theirs

> is an extraordinary reading of Gal 1:19. One reason for this seems to be the assumption that the status of true apostleship was limited to the twelve. Was Paul's claim to apostleship a claim to be one of the twelve? That is most unlikely. Rather Paul claimed apostleship of equal status with the twelve. The evidence of 1 Cor 15:7 implies that he recognized that James shared the status of "all the apostles." Thus the apostolic band included Peter and the twelve, James and all the apostles, and last of all Paul himself (15:5–8).[11]

Painter's last statement is undoubtedly the most accurate description of historical fact. There was an "apostolic band" that included, but was not limited to, the Twelve. The apostolic band would comprise all who had seen the risen Christ (Paul's criterion to be an apostle), which, according to 1 Corinthians, was a group of more than five hundred:

> [H]e appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. (1 Cor. 15:5–7)

To recap our findings to this point, in addition to Paul's testimony that James was a leading apostle in Jerusalem in the earliest days of the Christian movement, we have Luke's corroborating testimony that Peter wanted the news of his escape from prison to reach "James and the brethren" as soon as possible (Acts 12:17). It is likely that Luke's use of the term "brethren" here refers to the general community of believers, rather than Jesus' brothers, as it does also in Acts 1:15: "In those days Peter stood up among the brethren (the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty), and said, 'Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled'" (RSV). Here we see that the "brethren" of the earliest Christian community were a group of slightly over a hundred people *in Jerusalem* (surely a realistic and not exaggerated figure), and surely there were more in Galilee.

JAMES AND PETER

F. F. Bruce points out a significant implication in Peter's words, "Tell this to James and the brethren":

> This implies that James and the brethren associated with him met in a different place from Peter's company—that they belonged, to use Pauline language, to a different house-church. . . . it may be inferred that even at this early date James was the leader of one group in the Jerusalem church and Peter was the leader of another.[12]

Bruce's hypothesis is contrary to the traditional understanding that Peter was the sole head of the early church. The vast majority of scholars have held that James succeeded Peter as head of the Jerusalem church only after Peter's escape from prison (generally dated 41–44), since Peter would then have been a fugitive and forced to flee Jerusalem. Acts 12:17 has often been understood as marking the "passing of the baton" from Peter to James, after which Peter became a traveling missionary to the Jews living in the Diaspora (i.e., outside of Palestine). Current scholars who support this view include the conservatives Richard Bauckham, Ralph P. Martin, and Luke Timothy Johnson—and also, interestingly, the extremely liberal Gerd Lüdemann. A maverick voice arguing for a different interpretation is, again, John Painter. Because Painter bucks the consensus, and because his explanation is extremely significant, it is worth quoting his rationale at length:

> It has been suggested that the narrative of Acts portrays the leadership of the Jerusalem church at first by the apostles, headed by Peter . . . Acts 12:1–24 can be read as a kind of flashback to explain how James came to leadership, Herod Agrippa had James the brother of John executed and Peter was thrown into prison.
>
> The transition of authority from Peter to James is often taken to be implied by Acts 12:17. [But if] James *were already the leader,* nothing would be more natural than for Peter to report back to him. This reading is at least as plausible as the one that takes Peter's message to be a passing on of the authority of leadership. If this is what Luke meant to convey, why does Peter not resume leadership on his return to Jerusalem? In Acts 15 James is portrayed as the leader of the Jerusalem church even though Peter was then present again. It seems that the prominence of Peter in Acts has been interpreted in terms of his leadership. But that prominence is described more in terms of his activity in relation to those outside the believing community than in terms of leadership of the community. Peter, like Paul, is

portrayed as a “missionary” rather than as the leader of a settled community.

> Acts explicitly names no single leader of the Jerusalem church. The conclusion that Peter was the leader at first is the consequence of the influence of [a Catholic] interpretive tradition that has no support in relation to Jerusalem. Nothing in Acts supports this view. Indeed, the tradition that Peter was the leader runs contrary to tradition that concerns the Jerusalem church. [This] tradition names James as the first leader (“bishop”). The nomenclature is anachronistic, but the leadership of James is supported by the way in which James is cited in both Acts 15 and 21 as well as in Paul’s letter to the Galatians.[13] (italics mine)

We will be examining the James tradition to which Painter refers in a later chapter. For now, note well that Painter is cautious to say that his interpretation of James’s leadership from the beginning is only “at least as plausible” as the prevailing interpretation that James succeeded Peter. Painter cautiously adds:

> [I]n Acts and Galatians the sole leadership of James is not explicit. More than likely James was one of a group of leaders among whom he stood out, from the beginning, as the leading figure and dominant influence. Upon this basis the tradition of James as the first bishop of Jerusalem was developed.

Another factor that needs to be considered in assessing the case for James’s early leadership of the Jerusalem church is that Peter may have always been a *traveling* evangelist, while James is always portrayed as rooted in Jerusalem. Support for this is found in 1 Corinthians, where Paul rousingly defends his claim to the entitlements of apostleship against his critics who deny he is an apostle:

> Do we [Paul and Barnabas] not have the right to our food and drink? Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as the other apostles *and the brothers of the Lord*

> *and Cephas?* Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? (1 Cor. 9:4–6)

Some have said that here Paul is drawing a contrast between Jesus' brothers and the apostles, and therefore, Jesus' brothers were not apostles, but that interpretation leads necessarily to the conclusion that *Peter* was not an apostle because he is also mentioned separately from the apostles. So it is clearly not Paul's intent to imply that Jesus' brothers were not apostles. But we do have here firm support that Peter and Jesus' brothers were traveling evangelists. Whether James was also a traveling evangelist, or was permanently based in Jerusalem, is another question. Ralph Martin argues for traveling: "At 1 Cor 9:5 there is a[n] . . . allusion to 'the Lord's brothers,' among whom James is certainly to be numbered . . . Here . . . there is evidence that James was known . . . at Corinth to have sponsored missionary activity."[14] Of course, there is a big difference between *sponsoring* missionary activity and taking part in that activity oneself. In fact, Martin's suggestion that James sponsored missionary activity fits perfectly with the general picture of James we are beginning to see—that he was the settled overseer of the Jerusalem church, one who would indeed sponsor *all* missionary activity. It is hard to believe that James could have carried out the administrative role of leading the Jerusalem church while actively engaging in far-flung missionary activity.

This brings us to the next firm conclusion of our investigation: *At least by the time that Peter became a traveling missionary, if not earlier, James held the reins of leadership of the entire early Christian community both in Jerusalem and beyond.*

It can also be argued that the leadership of James is not explicit in either Acts or Galatians simply because *it was common knowledge.* Luke and Paul only tacitly imply James's leadership role for the same reason that they give him no introduction the first time he is mentioned: they would have been stating the obvious for readers familiar with James's person and position. While Painter's theory that James was *always* the leader of the Jerusalem church

has not yet persuaded the majority of scholars, it makes the best sense out of the biblical evidence and ties together many loose ends. Logically, nothing would be more natural, especially in Jewish society, than for the reins of leadership to be handed after Jesus' death to his eldest brother, especially if Jesus' role as Messiah was tied directly to his descent from King David. German theologian Ethelbert Stauffer was the first to champion the idea of Jesus' brothers and family forming a Christian "caliphate" after his death, a proposal for which there is reliable evidence in the later history and tradition of the Jerusalem church.

Galatians 1:19 might, however, seem to unseat any theory of James gripping the reins of leadership from the beginning. Paul asserts plainly that he "went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas." If James were the acknowledged leader, why would Paul have gone to Jerusalem with the express purpose of seeing *Peter*? Painter again provides a plausible answer: "Paul might have chosen to see Peter because Peter was perceived to be more sympathetic to Paul's cause. James, as the leader, was too important to be missed, and Peter may have effected an introduction for Paul."[15] This is, of course, speculation on Painter's part, but at the least, his argument adds to the probability of James having been the leader from the beginning and reminds us again how difficult it is to achieve absolute historical certainty.

JAMES AND THE RESURRECTION

For another piece of evidence in favor of James's early standing, let us look again at Paul's intriguing list of resurrection appearances in 1 Corinthians 15:3–7:

> 3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of

> whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

The vast majority of scholars are agreed that here Paul has preserved a traditional list that had been handed down to him, as Paul himself states in verse 3: “For I handed on to you as of first importance *what I in turn had received*.” This is a very early list, and it provides essential evidence that very early on—*perhaps even already at the time of Jesus’ death*—James was considered an apostle. F. F. Bruce argues in favor of this:

> “[A]ll the apostles” should certainly be interpreted as a wider body than “the twelve” and equally certainly James is to be regarded as one of those “apostles” as Peter is one of “the twelve.” The appearance of the risen Lord to James was no doubt something of which Paul heard from James himself during his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem just as he would have heard of the appearance to Peter from Peter himself.[16]

While there is scholarly unanimity about the authenticity of Paul’s list, there is much debate over the order in which the appearances took place (a very heated debate in the early church too). The scholarly debate today concerns whether Paul meant for his list to be understood in a temporal sequence (an In Order of Appearance listing, so to speak), or whether Paul did not intend such, but rather combined two lists that represented rival traditions in which one early Christian community claimed that the first appearance was to Peter, and another community claimed that James was the first to see the resurrected Christ. The idea of rival traditions (called *Rivalitätsformel* by the German liberal theologians who first proposed the idea) has a long history in scholarship. Today, Gerd Lüdemann upholds the classic German understanding, which goes back to the legendary Adolf von Harnack:

> The formula in 1 Cor 15:7 grew out of the fact that disciples of James claimed for their leader the primacy that Peter enjoyed by virtue of having received the initial resurrection appearance. To support this claim they constructed the formula of 15:7, patterned after that of 15:5. Although Paul . . . is reporting in chronological order, it is still questionable whether this development had occurred prior to Paul's first visit to Jerusalem. In any case, at that time James already had a group of disciples in Jerusalem, although Cephas was still the leading figure. Still, the process of a gradual shifting of authority from Peter to James can be traced in the life of the Jerusalem church.[17]

The pro-James community to which Lüdemann refers probably supported their claim with an apocryphal work, *The Gospel of the Hebrews*, that makes the astounding claim that the first resurrection appearance was to James: "And when the Lord had given the linen cloth [his burial shroud] to the servant of the priest, he went to James and appeared to him."[18]

John Painter proposes a surprising twist to the accepted German idea of rival formulas, which upholds the possibility that the first resurrection appearance really *was* to James, despite Paul's sequence, thus making James the leader of the Jerusalem church from its inception:

> According to Adolf von Harnack, the tradition assumes that Jesus first appeared to Peter in Galilee . . . and that the appearance to James was subsequent to the appearance to the five hundred brethren at Pentecost. Harnack argues that 15:5 and 15:7 reflect a shift from the leadership of Peter . . . to . . . James. [Wilhelm] Pratcher, building on the work of von Harnack, argues that 15:7 is based on 15:5 . . . reflecting the rivalry between the followers of James and the followers of Peter. Lüdemann develops a similar position . . . If the original leadership of Peter is accepted the *Rivalitätsformel* reflects a change of leadership in the Jerusalem church. Alternatively, we have argued that there was

> continuing tension between James and Peter (Galatians 2:11–14). . . . *it is possible to see the imposition of Petrine leadership as the later move.*[19] (italics mine)

In other words, Painter is positing that James had always been the leader of the Jerusalem church because Jesus appeared to him first. Later, a community loyal to Peter created a rival tradition, claiming that Peter had been the first recipient of a resurrection appearance. Painter essentially turns the traditional understanding on its head, and again shows us the slippery slope that threatens the quest for historical certainty.

To explore the farthest reaches of historical *un*certainty, let us now turn to an examination of the event known as the Jerusalem Conference (the very first "apostolic council" of the church) and the so-called Apostolic Decree that was promulgated there. While even more scholarly debate surrounds this episode (it is, in fact, another of the much-debated issues in New Testament studies), here the leadership of James is clearly undeniable, as is Peter's deference to him.

4

POPE JAMES: THE FIRST APOSTOLIC COUNCIL AND THE INCIDENT AT ANTIOCH

After the ascension of the savior, Peter, James, and John did not claim pre-eminence . . . but chose James the Just as Bishop of Jerusalem.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *HYPOSTASES*

Clement of Alexandria wrote sometime early in the third century, and thus might not at first seem to merit the claim of historical reliability. His use of the term *bishop* to describe James is certainly an anachronism. In his own time, James would have been called an overseer (*episkopos* in Greek), which is the word translated as "bishop" in the New Testament. But while the term *bishop* is not applied to James in the New Testament, as we shall see in this chapter it is absolutely an accurate description of the role that James played in the Jerusalem church.

As mentioned previously, in the beginning of his letter to the Galatians Paul provides a brief biographical summary of the first few years after his conversion experience. This account provides scholars with invaluable information for dating key events in the life of the early church, as well as providing us with important information regarding James's leadership role. The first two chapters of the letter to the Galatians are priceless; without them, our knowledge of early Christianity would be gravely impoverished. Here

is a condensation of the material crucial to our concerns, taken from Galatians 1 and 2:

> 13 You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it . . . 15 But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterward I returned to Damascus.
>
> 18 Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother . . .
>
> 1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. 2 I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain.

Whether Paul counts his "fourteen years" in 2:1 from the time of his conversion or from the time of his first visit to Jerusalem (three years after his conversion) is a matter of some debate, though most scholars favor the former interpretation. In any case, Paul's second visit to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles is generally dated around 48–49. While there is great uncertainty among scholars about when James came to be head of the Jerusalem church, there is *no* debate that by the time of Paul's second visit James held the reins of leadership.

It is fascinating (and surprising, if one is familiar with Paul) that in 2:2 Paul seems to submit his work among the Gentiles to the leaders of the church for their approval. Logically, such a move makes sense for a new missionary like Paul, especially in light of his former life as a persecutor of the church. Still, Paul's seeming submission to the

Jerusalem leaders is curious in light of the lengths to which he goes elsewhere in his letters to assert the complete independence of his mission from that of the other apostles. Noted early twentieth-century scholar A. S. Peake provides this sound rationale for Paul's unusual humility:

> The impulse for the journey . . . was to secure both his previous and his future mission from the risk of failure. By this he does not mean that he had any misgivings as to the truth of his gospel or thought that his seniors could correct any mistaken view which he might hold . . . But he was well aware how disastrous might be the consequences for his mission if a different form of the Gospel should be preached in the Gentile world with the prestige of the original apostles attaching to it . . . [H]e realized how much he would be hampered if the leaders of the Church at Jerusalem, the apostles who beyond all others might be expected to know the mind of their Master, had thrown the weight of their influence against his presentation of Christianity.[1]

As Peake points out, it would have been widely assumed that the original apostles knew Jesus' teachings better than anyone. In Jesus' absence, *they* were the authorities, and even as independent and authoritative a figure as Paul needed to evaluate his mission in light of their judgment of its conformity to Jesus' teaching. This has important ramifications for our understanding of James's role. It is quite likely that much of the prestige that James enjoyed, and a major reason for his rapid rise to leadership, was the perception that, as Jesus' eldest brother, he knew the "mind of the Master" better than anyone. And if indeed he did, Christians today are going to have to reevaluate some of their most deeply held assumptions and beliefs about Jesus and his teaching.

THE CIRCUMCISION QUESTION

Succeeding verses of Galatians 2 explain that there was more to Paul's visit than simply seeking approval for his mission to the Gentiles—namely, addressing the crucial question of whether his

Gentile converts needed to be circumcised in order to become Christians. That Paul needed to confer with the leadership in Jerusalem over this question speaks volumes. It shows that Paul was questioning a widely held assumption that Gentile converts *were* in fact required to undergo circumcision—in essence, to become a Jew—in order to follow Christ.

This requirement makes sense when we remind ourselves that at this point Christianity was a *Jewish* phenomenon. It was not yet a separate and distinct religion, but rather a sect of Judaism. At this early time, the *only* thing that distinguished Jesus' followers from any other Jews was their belief that, in Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah of Israel had arrived. Originally, they were not even called Christians, but "Nazarenes" (see Acts 24:5), the implications of which we shall discuss later. Acts attests clearly to their continued regular attendance at the services of the Temple and the goodwill they had from their fellow Jews, demonstrating that the disciples' faith and practice remained thoroughly Jewish:

> All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. (Acts 2:44–47)

The Jewish scholar, Hyam Maccoby, has pointed out some fascinating implications of the fact that the disciples continued to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Temple that had been the central focus of Jewish religious life since the days of King Solomon:

> The book of Acts does not disguise the fact that the Nazarenes of Jerusalem, in the days immediately following the death of Jesus, consisted of observant Jews, for whom the Torah was still in force. For example, we are told that 'they kept up their daily attendance at the Temple' (Acts 2:46). Evidently, then, Jesus'

> followers regarded the services of the Temple as still valid, with its meat and vegetable offerings, its Holy of Holies, its golden table for the showbread, and its *menorah* or candelabra with its seven branches symbolizing the seven planets. All these were venerated by the followers of Jesus, who made no effort to set up a central place of worship of their own . . . Also, their acceptance of Temple worship implied an acceptance of the Aaronic priesthood who administered the Temple. Though Jesus' movement had a system of leadership of its own, this was not a rival priesthood.[2]

Maccoby's stark conclusion is not often considered by Christian scholars for obvious reasons. Until only very recently, Christian scholarship has instead viewed Christianity as representing a complete and total break with Judaism from the time of Jesus' death;[*12] whereas, in fact, Christianity became distinct from Judaism through a slow and gradual process, a process that has been accurately described by James Dunn in his enlightening volume, *The Partings of the Ways*.

In the eyes of Jesus' original Jewish followers, any Gentile who wanted to become a follower of Jesus was, in fact, becoming a follower of Judaism. But as Paul's evangelism brought in ever-larger numbers of Gentile converts, the issue of just how far these converts had to go in order to become followers became very difficult. New Gentile believers who were male would, quite understandably, want to put off circumcision if at all possible. Jewish believers, on the other hand, fretted that relaxing the circumcision requirement could potentially threaten all the requirements of the Torah. As Paul's ministry grew, the issue became increasingly urgent. Was any relaxing of the Law of Moses possible in these new circumstances? These are the questions that the Jerusalem Conference was called to decide.

THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE

The Jerusalem Conference, described in Acts 15 as a meeting of all the key leaders of the primitive church, can legitimately be called the church's first apostolic council. There has been an enormous amount of debate over whether the meeting with the apostles that Paul discusses in Galatians is in fact the Jerusalem Conference, or perhaps a different meeting, a debate we shall examine momentarily. In any case, as we read Paul's description of his meeting with the apostles in Galatians 2, we come to a startling realization. It is quite obvious that Paul harbors some resentment toward the apostles in Jerusalem, for his tone is nothing short of sarcastic:

> And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those leaders contributed nothing to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do. (Gal. 2:6–10)

First, note Paul's listing of the leaders: "James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars." Most scholars believe that James's position in the list clearly implies that he was the most important of the three. As F. F. Bruce comments, "Next time Paul visited Jerusalem, James's leading role had been established . . . the order in which [the] names are given tells its own story, which is confirmed by the general impression made by all the relevant evidence."[3]

Second, Paul's use of the term "acknowledged pillars" to describe James, Peter, and John is significant. The generally accepted

meaning behind Paul's usage of the term *pillars* is given in an article on James in the standard reference *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*:

> The metaphor could be an eschatological one which originated not with Paul but with the Jerusalem Christians. Paul was apparently aware that they spoke of their leading apostles as "pillars" because of the positions of importance they believed [they] would occupy in the eschatological temple in the age to come.[4]

The term *eschatological* refers to beliefs concerning the "end times" or the "last things," what the Jews of Jesus' time called the Day of the Lord, which had been foretold by prophets. Following Jesus' resurrection from the dead, his followers believed that the Day of the Lord and the final judgment was imminent. The popular historical Jesus scholar N. T. Wright has taken up the idea championed by the legendary Albert Schweitzer a century ago, that Jesus fully believed his messianic mission would usher in the Day of the Lord and the final judgment. Wright has proposed that Jesus viewed his ministry as the establishing of a new messianic community that would be a replacement for the Temple, which he had predicted would soon be destroyed, marking the end of the age (see Mark 13). James, Peter, and John were thus looked upon after Jesus' death and resurrection as the "pillars" of the new eschatological "Temple" of the New Jerusalem in the soon-to-be-realized Kingdom of God.

While Paul acknowledges their role as pillars, and seems to defer to their leadership by asking their approval for his mission to the Gentiles, he betrays a definite note of condescension when he refers to them as, "those who were *supposed* to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those leaders contributed nothing to me." Scholars agree that here Paul is trying to impress upon the Galatians the independence of his mission from the Jerusalem leadership by implying that his mission does not require the blessing of James, Peter, and John to be valid; for, as Paul argues elsewhere, his mission was received as a direct commission from the risen Christ

himself. Paul therefore believed he had full independent authority and need not submit to anyone, including the pillar apostles. Paul's very first words in Galatians emphasize this: "Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father."

Some scholars have seen Paul's tone in Galatians 2 as evidence of a much deeper rift between Paul and the pillar apostles than Paul was at liberty to divulge in a publicly circulated epistle. F. C. Baur was the first to propose, in the 1800s, that there was outright animosity between Paul and the pillar apostles. Baur, affectionately referred to as the Old Master of Tübingen by his students, was one of the founders of the so-called Tübingen school which arose at Tübingen University, and which influenced continental European Protestant theology for almost a century. Baur's theory of outright opposition between Paul and the pillar apostles generally fell out of favor after World War I, especially in light of the burgeoning influence of Rudolph Bultmann's antihistorical methodology.[*13] But Baur's ideas never completely died, and they have been revived in modern times by liberal scholars such as Gerd Lüdemann and Michael Goulder, and by Jewish scholars such as Hyam Maccoby and Hugh Schonfield. While such theories are generally belittled by conservative Christian and most mainstream scholars, the widely respected mainstream scholar James Dunn has called for a reappraisal and reappropriation of Baur's theories.[5] Even the popular evangelical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson, who is quite hesitant to ascribe any animosity between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership, still acknowledges that Paul's tone toward the pillar apostles

> indicates some reservation by Paul concerning their reputation . . . But although his tone is cool, Paul does not question the authority of the three leaders. Indeed he comes prepared to submit . . . for their consideration the gospel he preaches among the Gentiles, and specifically states his willingness to defer to their judgment, "lest I am running or have run in vain" (2:2). His

> claim that they imposed no further obligation on him (2:6) . . . and that they recognized the legitimacy of the gift God had given him for his mission to the Gentiles (2:9) is implicit acknowledgment of their authority to discern and judge.[6]

Whatever the actual state of affairs was between Paul and Jerusalem, the bottom line would seem to be given in Galatians 2:9: "[W]hen James and Cephas and John . . . recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised." According to Paul, a demarcation of mission territories had been amicably agreed to.

It is this official agreement that seems to be the basis of the trouble that necessitated Paul's rather angry letter to the Galatians. Apparently, influential people from Jerusalem had journeyed to the Galatians to inform them that they needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. Their influence was such that the Galatian Christians had begun to practice circumcision. Thus it is that at the beginning of his letter to the Galatians, Paul says:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the Grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel . . . [T]here are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel . . . But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! (Gal. 1:6–8)

That those who are proclaiming the "contrary gospel" are respected, leading figures necessitates Paul's assertion that it doesn't matter whether an *angel* proclaimed it—it would still be in error. There are some scholars who believe this is an indirect reference to the pillar apostles themselves.

We may at this point ask: What exactly is the contrary gospel that so upset Paul? The answer is to be found in Acts 15, where Luke describes the turmoil that had erupted in the Gentile church in Antioch, which precipitated the need for the Jerusalem Conference:

> Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss the question with the apostles and the elders. (Acts 15:1–2)

Although Acts is describing a situation in Antioch, the problem was the same in Galatia. In fact, the same perpetrators (“certain individuals . . . from Judea”) seem to have been at work in both places, teaching that the circumcision of Gentile converts was a necessity for salvation, not faith in Christ alone as Paul taught. That is, the passage in Acts seems to explain the purpose of Paul’s second visit to Jerusalem which he describes in Galatians, and the reason for the meeting and the cast of characters seem to be the same in both accounts.

Scholars, however, have long noticed discrepancies between Acts 15 and Galatians 2 that call into question whether Luke and Paul are in fact describing the same meeting. Seemingly irreconcilable differences in the two accounts have led many scholars to conclude that the Jerusalem Conference described in Acts 15 actually happened *after* Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians, and that the meeting Paul discusses in the letter was an earlier, less official assembly. Whatever the case, here is the account of the Jerusalem Conference as described by Luke in Acts 15:

> 4 When they [Paul and the delegation from Antioch] came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. 5 But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them [the Gentiles] to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”
>
> 6 The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. 7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and

said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. 8 And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; 9 and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. 10 Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? 11 On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

12 The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told all the signs and wonders that God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

Here we see that certain believers in Jerusalem, who were members of the Pharisaic (conservative) party, believed strongly that circumcision and adherence to the Law was a strict requirement for Gentile converts. And the question obviously had not yet been decided. It cannot be stressed enough, that *Jesus and his earliest followers were thoroughly Jewish in their beliefs and practices.* What later became the distinct religion of Christianity began as a messianic movement within Judaism, and the *only* thing that distinguished the members of the Jerusalem church from their fellow Jews was their firm belief that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel. Therefore, it was only natural for those first believers in Jesus to expect that anyone wishing to follow Jesus would become a Jew. They were in fact becoming part of the Israel of which Jesus was the Messiah.

At the opening of this crucial meeting between the delegates from Antioch and the leaders of the Jerusalem church, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas (Paul’s missionary companion) give testimony to how God has been at work though the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles. The conversion of so many Gentile believers was seen by many (Paul most of all) as a fulfilling of the biblical prophecies that at the end of

the age the nations would come streaming into Jerusalem acknowledging the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the God of all the world, culminating in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth with Jesus as the eternal Davidic king.

Paul pushed the question that was most painfully at the forefront of the Gentile mind: Was circumcision really a necessary requirement for Gentiles to become part of Jesus' new kingdom? And here we come to a vital bit of information. According to the account in Acts, it is not Peter, but *James* who makes the final call on this crucial issue, which speaks volumes about James's sole leadership role in the Jerusalem church:

> 13 After they [Paul and Barnabas] finished speaking, James replied, "My brothers listen to me. 14 Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. 15 This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written,
>
> 16 'After this I will return,
> And I will rebuild the dwelling of David,
> which has fallen;
> from its ruins I will rebuild it,
> and I will set it up,
> 17 so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—
> even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called.
> Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things
> 18 known from long ago.'
>
> 19 Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, 20 but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. 21 For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every Sabbath in the synagogues."

Thus ends the speech of James, which, except for the epistle of James, are the only words in the New Testament attributed directly to him. Whether they are the actual words of James is, of course, impossible to prove. But while many scholars have doubted the historicity of this account in Acts, there are solid reasons to trust it. First and foremost, James's leadership is plainly demonstrated, which ironically suggests that it is more trustworthy than less. Luke is widely accepted as an advocate of Pauline doctrine, meaning that he had no reason to invent a situation where James had the final say and where his arguments carried the day. And James does indeed issue the final word on the matter in the so-called Apostolic Decree.

THE APOSTOLIC DECREE

Immediately following James's speech in Acts 15, we are told that an official letter regarding the matter was composed and sent back with Paul and Barnabas:

> 22 Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas, called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, 23 with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. 24 Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds, 25 we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas who will themselves tell you the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: 29 that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."

The four requirements of this Apostolic Decree—abstaining from food offered to idols, from fornication, from eating animals that have been strangled, and from eating rare meat ("from blood")—are ancient regulations found in the Law of Moses. In the section of the Law given in Leviticus 17, known as the Holiness Code, these same requirements are listed in the same order. These were known as the Noahide Laws (named after Noah) and were the minimum requirements for observance of the Law imposed upon Gentiles who wished to follow Judaism without taking the step of being circumcised and becoming full Jews. Such partial converts were known as "God-fearers." That these requirements are correctly listed in the Apostolic Decree certainly lends it authenticity, belying the notion that Luke, himself a Gentile, freely composed this section. Logically, it would only be natural for James and the Torah-observant apostles and elders to look to the Torah for guidance on the question of requirements for Gentile converts. Adding support to this line of reasoning is the fact that James quotes the Hebrew prophet Amos in support of his argument (compare Acts 15:16–18 with Amos 9:11–12). Here we have a poetic rendering of the concept, also expressed by Isaiah, that on the eschatological Day of the Lord, the Gentiles will come streaming into the Temple in Jerusalem proclaiming Yahweh as the God of all the earth.

The main proponent of James's speech being authentic is Richard Bauckham, who examines it in great detail in his groundbreaking essay "James and the Jerusalem Church." Bauckham sees James's use of Amos 9:11–12 as a vital piece of evidence in favor of the speech's authenticity:

> Many other prophecies portrayed the Temple of the messianic age as a place where the Gentiles would come into God's presence . . . There were also prophecies predicting that the Gentile nations would become, like Israel, God's own people . . . But in most cases such texts *could* be taken to mean that these Gentiles would be proselytes, undergoing circumcision as the corollary of their conversion . . . These texts could not decisively settle the issue. But Amos 9:11–12 could, for it states that the

> nations [as] Gentile nations belong to [Yahweh]. Precisely as “all the nations” they are included in the covenant relationship . . . Probably no other scriptural text could have been used to make this point so clearly.[7]

As to the overall authenticity of James’s speech, Bauckham concludes:

> The argument which James’s speech represents . . . is exactly the kind of argument about the relation of Gentile Christians to the Law of Moses which we should expect from the Jerusalem church leaders. It . . . skillfully deploys the exegetical methods of contemporary Jewish exegesis. It employs the notion of the Christian community as the messianic Temple, which we know to have been important to the Jerusalem church under James’s leadership. It deals with the question of Gentile Christians in a way which by no means sets aside the authority of the Law of Moses but fully upholds it . . .
>
> These considerations make the Jerusalem church leadership, with James at its head, very plausibly the source of the apostolic decree . . . It is almost universally agreed, for good reasons, that the decree itself is not a Lukan invention . . . though many scholars doubt that Luke can have correctly described the circumstance of its formulation.[8]

By the “circumstance of its formulation,” Bauckham is referring to the notorious difficulty scholars face in trying to reconcile the way the Apostolic Decree is described in Acts with Paul’s understanding of the result of the meeting he had with the apostles as described in Galatians 2:10. The Apostolic Decree places four binding stipulations upon Gentile converts, but in Galatians 2:10, Paul says, “They asked *only one thing,* that we remember the poor,” referring to the collection for the poor in Jerusalem, which he enthusiastically supported throughout his mission. If there were any other requirements, Paul does not mention them. But an even more problematic issue is this: If there had indeed been an official

Apostolic Decree issued that stated that circumcision was not necessary for Gentiles, *why doesn't Paul cite the decree in his argument with the Galatians?* This, more than anything else, has led the majority of scholars to believe that the account of the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15 occurred *after* Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians.

RECONCILING ACCOUNTS

The problem of reconciling Acts 15 with Galatians 2 has long been one of the thorniest issues in the history of New Testament scholarship. The *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* summarizes the many and various ways that scholars have tried to reconcile the two accounts, some quite ingenious. According to the *Dictionary,* at least eight different proposals have been advanced (my own annotations are in brackets):[9]

1. Galatians 2 = Acts 15.
2. Galatians 2 = Acts 11 [Paul's famine-relief visit].
3. Galatians 2 = Acts 11 = Acts 15 (Luke, or his traditions, has misinterpreted what happened in the visit of Galatians 2 and erroneously reported it twice).
4. Galatians 2 = Acts 18 [Paul's brief visit to Jerusalem after his second missionary journey].
5. Galatians 2 = Acts 15:1– 4 [only].
6. Galatians 2 = Acts 11 + Acts 15 (Luke, or his traditions, has misinterpreted what happened in the visit of Galatians 2 and erroneously reported what happened on this occasion as occurring at two separate times).
7. Galatians 2 is not reported in Acts.
8. Galatians 2 = Acts 9 [Paul's first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem].

The Dictionary identifies solutions 1, 2, and 6 as the most probable and widely accepted. Perhaps the most even-handed assessment of the situation comes, once again, from the venerable A. S. Peake, whose 1929 analysis of the matter is well worth quoting at length:

> [T]he identification of the visit in Gal. ii. 1–10 with that in Acts xv. is favoured . . . if we remember that Paul is writing with the inside knowledge of one who had been a party to the discussion and who was stating his own position as he saw it, while Luke describes the events as they appeared to the community in general. Paul is not concerned with the general assembly of the Church, though his language seems to imply that the larger body met; much more important to him is the private conference at which the leaders of the mother Church recognized the vocation of himself and Barnabas and delimited their spheres of work . . . It must be conceded that Paul, in perfect good faith, is telling the story from his own point of view, and that if we had the account of Peter or James the impression of the incidents and the discussion might be modified. But be that as it may, it would be perilous to use the narrative in the Acts to discredit, or even to modify the account given by Paul. Luke had no first-hand knowledge of the facts but was dependent on what information he could collect when in Palestine; and as a Gentile he was less qualified to grasp the full significance of the events than a Jew would have been.[10]

Among contemporary scholars, the more conservative scholars generally believe that Acts 15 and Galatians 2 are describing the same event, while more liberal scholars think that Luke has freely composed Acts 15 to sum up his interpretation of events. But, again, there are exceptions. Gerd Lüdemann, who resides near the radical left end of the theological spectrum, believes that Acts 15 is basically historical as it stands. The Roman Catholic historical Jesus scholar John P. Meier believes that Acts 15 and Galatians 2 essentially describe the same event, with the caveat that the Apostolic Decree

was a later addition by Luke. Among conservatives, F. F. Bruce believes that the Jerusalem Conference described in Acts 15, while historical, was a later meeting held sometime after an earlier, private meeting with the pillar apostles that Paul describes in Galatians. Lending weight to this idea is Paul's description of the meeting in 2:2 as "only . . . a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders." Finally, Richard Bauckham, along with most conservatives, believes the two accounts can be completely reconciled.[11]

Indeed, the accounts *can* easily be reconciled, and without a lot of mental gymnastics, if one simply makes the assumption that Paul wrote Galatians *before* the Jerusalem Conference and the issuance of the Apostolic Decree, and this position has therefore become the most widely held. It is the only solution that answers the simple question: Why didn't Paul cite the decree? Walter Schmithals summed up scholarship on this issue midcentury, and his assessment remains true today: "Most commentators today assume that [the Apostolic Decree] originated in the period *after* the [Antioch incident] and was recommended by the Jewish Christians to the Gentile Christians in order to make table-fellowship possible between them."[12] The evidence for this is to be found in the event that Paul describes next in Galatians 2, a major crisis that is curiously not mentioned in Acts, where Peter and Paul nearly come to blows.

THE INCIDENT AT ANTIOCH

We know of the incident at Antioch solely from Paul. Luke may not have wished to include this account in his history of the church because serious conflict between church leaders disrupted his intent to portray a harmonious community. Paul's brutally honest account in Galatians 2, therefore, belies Luke's idealized picture all the more. Note well the implications of Paul's reference to James:

> 11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; 12 for *until certain people came from James*, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after

> they came, he drew back *for fear of the circumcision faction*. 13 And the other Jews joined him in the hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

This is one of the more revealing passages in the New Testament for what it tells us about the composition and beliefs of what we call the early "church." It becomes more and more obvious that the first followers of Jesus thought of themselves as nothing other than Jews. What Paul says of Peter in verse 14 speaks volumes: "If you though a *Jew . . .*" And notice how Paul refers to the other believers in verse 13: "And the other *Jews* joined him . . ." Plainly, they, and Peter, still think of themselves as Jews. Indeed, Acts itself says that Jesus' followers were not called "Christians" for many years after Jesus' death: "and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians'" (Acts 11:26). Before this they were sometimes called "Nazarenes," a designation with important ramifications which we shall examine later. Their being called Nazarene (in Greek *Nazorean*) may well imply their thorough *Jewishness,* for as we shall see in the next chapter, Nazarene may be a term associating them with the strict ascetic Jewish group known as the Nazirites.

The second startling point about the account of the Antioch incident is the plain fact that Paul and Peter are at cross-purposes, and the reason for their coming to loggerheads is *James*. Paul, the newcomer, the former persecutor of Christians, who we know aided and abetted in the stoning of Stephen,[*14] dares to take Peter to task. The issue? A delicate one to be sure: Jews sharing meals with Gentiles. It is one thing to say that Gentiles may become part of the Christian community without being circumcised and may observe only a very limited part of the Law; it is another to figure out how Jews and Gentiles could share table-fellowship. Resolving this issue wasn't just a matter of Gentiles agreeing to "eat kosher" when with

Jews. As we know from the trouble Jesus often got himself into, Jews were not allowed to share meals with Gentiles *under any circumstances.* Gentiles were "unclean" according to the Law of Moses. Peter, however, apparently in line with the practice of Jesus, had no problem sitting down and breaking bread with non-Jewish converts. Key to our purposes is James's role in the matter. Taking Paul's words at face value, a delegation sent by James from Jerusalem caused not only Peter, but Paul's close companion Barnabas to stop sharing meals with the Gentiles—and Paul reacts vigorously.

James obviously wielded quite a bit of power. Even this point, however, is not undisputed. Once again, more conservative scholars, hesitant to see any serious differences between Paul and James, have proposed that the "certain people . . . from James" did *not* come with any official backing from James, but were stricter Law-observant "Judaizers" who wished to turn back the clock on open relations with the Gentiles, and who only used James's name and claimed his support. Advocates of this position point to James's speech at the Jerusalem Conference to show that he, in line with Jesus' teaching, took a liberal position on how the Law applied to Gentiles and would not have forbidden Peter from table-fellowship with them. The credibility of this view, of course, depends on whether one purpose of the Apostolic Decree was to enable table-fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. Alternatively, the decree could simply address the minimum dietary laws Gentiles were required to follow, without setting any precedent on the subject of breaking bread with Jews. Conservative scholars also point to Paul's statement that Peter and Barnabas withdrew from table-fellowship "for fear of the circumcision faction," a faction scholars argue was an ultra-conservative "Judaizing" group at odds with James, who had heard their demands about circumcision at the Jerusalem Conference and disagreed (at least according to Luke).

But if the men from Jerusalem were not sent by James, why in the world would both Peter and Barnabas yield to their demands? It would seem that the *only* person powerful enough to have influenced

Peter and Barnabas in this way would be Jesus' brother. The only logical conclusion would then seem to be that these men were indeed sent by James to check up on the rumors of laxity regarding the observance of the Law by Jewish Christians at Antioch.

There are other possibilities to consider, however—first, that the decree may not yet have been issued at the time of the Antioch incident. The very existence of the circumcision faction points to this, for it is unlikely that such a faction would exist if the Apostolic Decree was in force. Of course, a conservative faction opposed to the decree could have survived after the Jerusalem Council, but would Peter and Barnabas have bowed to them when the decree had been issued by apostolic fiat? The only other possibility, already alluded to, is that the Apostolic Decree did not really enable table-fellowship, but rather spoke only to Gentile requirements without loosening any requirements for Jewish Christians. A. S. Peake supports this solution:

> It is important to realize that the question at issue [at Antioch] was not that which had been decided at the Council at Jerusalem. At this the Gentiles . . . had been exempted from circumcision and obedience to the Law. But nothing had been said as to the relationship in which the Jewish Christians stood to the Law. In a purely Jewish church the members would go on keeping it. . . . the question had not been considered what course should be followed in a church with both Jews and Gentiles in its membership.[13]

Richard Bauckham also follows this line of reasoning: "the enabling of table fellowship [is not the Decree's] primary purpose. Galatians 2:11–14 may describe . . . the situation that required a decision by the Jerusalem leaders."[14]

A more controversial line of thought is pursued by John Painter, who, along with F. C. Baur and the nineteenth-century Tübingen school, does not think that James was as liberal on these issues as most scholars suppose. Painter says bluntly: "The circumcision party

is to be identified with James and those who had come representing him to Antioch"[15] (italics mine). Painter sees no need to place the Antioch incident prior to the formulation of the Apostolic Decree; rather,

> [t]he situation in Antioch provided the first test of the accord . . . and it was James who gave the definitive Jerusalem position, and Peter bowed to his leadership . . . Given the status and standing of Peter, some great authority must have been behind the circumcision party and been the source of his fear. This can only be James.

Painter's latter statement is difficult to argue with, given Peter's undisputed prominence in the church's hierarchy. If this interpretation is correct (and it is the *only* interpretation that takes Paul's words at face value), then Galatians 2:11–14 gives us firm evidence that James was a conservative when it came to the Law, at least insofar as the Law applied to Jewish Christians. That James threw his support behind Paul's mission at the Jerusalem Conference by requiring only minimal observance of the Law from *Gentile* Christians does not mean that James believed that the Law was any less fully in effect for *Jewish* Christians. To wit, New Testament scholar David Catchpole made a rather daring proposal in the 1970s that makes eminent sense of the situation:

> So precise and so exact is the correspondence between the demands involved in the Gal. ii 11–14 situation and the demands expressed in the Decree that we are, I believe, driven to one and only one conclusion: the demands laid down in Antioch are none other than the demands of the Decree. That is, the emissaries who came from James to Antioch brought the Decree.[16]

If the Apostolic Decree is indeed historical, and if it was already in effect at the time of the Antioch incident, then the differing stances of Peter, Paul, and James would seem to show that the decree was open to interpretation regarding mixed table fellowship—James

taking a conservative stance, Paul a liberal one, and Peter, as usual, waffling. Under pressure, Peter and Barnabas both agreed with the view of James, which has significant implications for our understanding of the historical Jesus, as we shall soon see.

Before we turn from the Antioch incident, there is one more piece of evidence regarding James's power and influence that must not escape our notice: Not only did Peter withdraw from table-fellowship with the Gentiles, but so did Paul's fellow missionary Barnabas. In fact, it was immediately after this conflict that Paul and Barnabas, after many missionary journeys together, went their separate ways. Let us hear a concluding word about the ramifications of all of this from the evenhanded James Dunn, who explains that the trail of evidence has led us far from the traditional Christian understanding that at Antioch Paul was in the right and Peter stood corrected:

> We naturally tend to assume that Paul made his point and won the day—Peter admitting his mistake, and the previous practice being resumed. But Paul does not actually say so . . . if Paul had won, and if Peter had acknowledged the force of his argument, Paul would surely have noted this, just as he strengthened his earlier position by noting the approval of the "pillar apostles" in 2.7–10. In the circumstances then, *it is quite likely that Paul was defeated at Antioch . . .*
>
> Whatever the precise facts of the matter then it is evident that *there was a much deeper divide between Paul and the Jewish Christianity emanating from Jerusalem than at first appears* . . . [T]he fierceness of his response to Peter at Antioch . . . may well have been a contributing factor of some significance in fuelling that antagonism of Jewish Christianity towards Paul.[17]

The growing animosity between Paul and the Jewish Christians comes even more sharply into focus in the account of Paul's final journey to Jerusalem, where his very presence in the Temple sparks rioting in the streets by the Jerusalem Christians, and Paul has to be taken into protective custody by a Roman tribune. On the very steps

of the Temple, the growing animosity between Paul and Jerusalem comes to a shocking head.

5

APOSTOLIC INTRIGUE: PAUL'S FINAL VISIT TO JERUSALEM AND THE DEATH OF JAMES

> *The judges of the Sanhedrin . . . brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ . . .*
>
> JOSEPHUS, *ANTIQUITIES OF THE JEWS*

The final piece of evidence regarding James to be found in the New Testament is the dramatic account in Acts 21 of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, generally dated around the year 56. This is one of the "we sections" of Acts—apparently a firsthand account, often thought to be written by Luke himself, and generally considered historically accurate by almost all scholars. The section relevant to James begins:

> 17 When we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us warmly. 18 The next day Paul went with us to visit James; and all the elders were present. 19 After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

Of note here is the fact that James is singled out as being the leader of the elders, the main person Paul is there to see. What the elders relate to Paul, after hearing of his successful ministry among the Gentiles, is filled with intrigue:

> 20 When they heard it, they praised God. Then they said to him,
> “You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are
> among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law. 21 They
> have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living
> among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not
> to circumcise their children or observe the customs. 22 What
> then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.”

Extremely interesting developments! It is plain that James and the elders are quite proud of the zeal for the Law that the Jewish believers possess. It is almost as if the elders of the Jewish Christians are trying to top Paul’s achievement after he relates his great success among the Gentiles. One can almost hear their subtext: “Oh, yes? Well, wait till you hear how many thousands of *Jews* we’ve converted! And *they* obey the *Law!”*

Naturally, the elders exhibit quite a bit of concern about the reputation that Paul is garnering among the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, a reputation based on stories circulating that Paul is turning Jews living outside of Palestine away from the Law. And they seem to show concern not only for Paul’s reputation, but also for his safety: “What then is to be done?” they ask. “They will certainly hear that you have come.”

It is interesting that earlier, in Acts 21:11, a prophet name Agabus had warned that Paul would be in danger from “the Jews in Jerusalem,” and Paul’s companions strongly urged him not to go there. Their misgivings would, unfortunately, soon be borne out. Fearing for his safety, the elders prescribe a course of action for Paul that will publicly demonstrate to all that he is in fact loyal to the Law of Moses:

> 23 “So do what we tell you. We have four men who are under a
> vow. 24 Join these men, go through the rite of purification with
> them, and pay for the shaving of their heads. Thus all will know
> that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but
> that you yourself observe and guard the law. 25 But as for the
> Gentiles who have become believers, we have sent a letter with

> our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."

More interesting developments. As a public demonstration of his orthodoxy, Paul is advised to financially sponsor some men who are apparently taking what was known as a Nazirite vow. The Nazirites were a strict Jewish religious order that observed ascetic practices such as abstaining from alcohol, fasting, refraining from cutting their hair, and rigorously upholding the Law. The great biblical hero and Israelite judge, Samson, despite his well-known lust for women, was a Nazirite. In urging Paul to make a public demonstration of his loyalty by publicly sponsoring these Nazirite novices, James and the elders appear to be supporting Paul, and they seem to realize that the charges against him are untrue. Indeed, while Paul fought for a minimum adherence to the Law for Gentiles, it is quite unlikely that he would have taught Jews to abandon the Law. But, rightly or wrongly, the majority of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were not at all supportive of Paul, to put it mildly.

Perhaps the most interesting thing in this section is that, quite oddly, the elders inform Paul about the terms of the Apostolic Decree as if Paul had never heard of it before. It could, therefore, be speculated that Paul is silent about the decree in his letter to the Galatians because he has not heard of it before. As we saw in the last chapter, however, all the pertinent evidence leads to the conclusion that the decree was in place already at the time of the Antioch incident, and it is hard to believe that Luke, who has described the Jerusalem Conference and the issuance of the Apostolic Decree only six chapters earlier, would let such an editorial blunder slip through. The more likely explanation for the inclusion of verse 25 is that it is instead an editorial insertion for the benefit of the *readers,* in order to jog our memories on the terms of the decree.

In any event, Paul does as the elders urge him, sponsors the men, and goes into the Temple with them to undergo the rite of purification. Toward the end of this seven-day-long ritual, however,

the fears of all are realized when some “Jews from Asia” (i.e., Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey) see Paul in the Temple and a riot ensues:

> 27 When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, who had seen him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd. They seized him, 28 shouting, “Fellow Israelites, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against our people, against our law, and this place . . .” 30 Then all the city was aroused, and the people rushed together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut. 31 While they were trying to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32 Immediately he took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. When they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. 33 Then the tribune came, arrested him and ordered him to be bound.

Paul, likely owing his life to the quick intervention of the Roman tribune and his cohort, is taken into protective custody and a series of trials ensues in the Roman courts. Because Paul is a Roman citizen, he manages to have his case taken all the way to the imperial court of the Roman governor, Festus, as Acts goes on to relate.

In all of this, Luke seems to be quite candid in his depiction of the very real friction between Paul and the Jewish Christians, but, then, this passage *is* an eyewitness account written in the first person, so candor here is not so surprising. Still, we have to wonder how much is left unsaid because of Luke’s well-known tendency to whitewash antagonisms within the church. The way Luke depicts the event, James and the elders showed genuine support for Paul, and the trouble that erupted was due to a simple misunderstanding among those “zealous for the law.” One has to wonder, though, whether James and the elders couldn’t have simply explained the truth about Paul to their more conservative brethren in the Jerusalem church. Would they not have listened?

Some intriguing questions have been raised around these issues by James Dunn, who also indicates the importance of what Luke does not say in Acts:

> when Paul was arrested and put on trial we hear nothing of any Jewish Christians standing by him, speaking in his defence—and this despite James's apparent high standing among orthodox Jews . . . Where were the Jerusalem Christians? It looks very much as though they had washed their hands of Paul, left him to stew in his own juice. If so it implies *a fundamental antipathy on the part of the Jewish Christians to Paul himself and what he stood for.*[1]

Some scholars go even further than Dunn, claiming that James and the elders purposely lured Paul into a trap.[2] If such an idea appears totally unfounded, note the end of verse 30: "They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut." Such speculations are little more than conjecture, yet Dunn's assertion—while a sour note in the harmonious song the church has sung about itself throughout the centuries—is congruous with all the other evidence we have examined to this point. It should be quite obvious by now that Paul was despised by the Jewish Christians.

THE COLLECTION FOR THE POOR

It is also curious in Acts 21 that Luke makes no mention of Paul's reason for visiting Jerusalem—to deliver the collection that he had gone to such great lengths throughout his journeys to take up on behalf of "the poor" in Jerusalem. This is a highly unusual omission of what would certainly have been a momentous event in the history of the church, and Acts' silence about the delivery of the collection has caused more than a few scholars to conclude that the collection was actually rejected by the elders. That would have been a bitter pill for Paul to swallow, and if indeed the collection was rejected, it is reasonable to suppose that Luke—always at pains to portray the church harmoniously—would have covered up incontrovertible

evidence of a rift between Paul and Jerusalem. Luke's silence on the collection speaks loudly.

If it is true that the collection was rejected, then relations between Paul and Jerusalem had indeed reached the breaking point. Even conservative Ralph P. Martin admits that, by the time of Paul's final visit to Jerusalem, his "ministry was decisively rejected by James and the Jerusalem leadership."[3] The official acceptance of a collection gathered from Paul's Gentile congregations would have been seen as tacit approval of Paul's teachings. But this line of reasoning would not seem to be supported by Paul's statement in Galatians 2:10: "*They asked* only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was quite eager to do." Why, if the collection was at the request of James, Peter and John, and was so desperately needed, would the collection have been rejected when it was at hand?

The answer may be that the collection meant different things to Paul and the Jerusalem leadership, and Paul's acceptance of the commission from the elders does not necessarily mean they were in accord. German scholar, Dieter Georgi, has thoroughly researched this issue in *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem.* Georgi begins by noting that Paul's willingness to agree to the collection was seen as being the fatal flaw in F. C. Baur's theory of a fundamental antipathy between Paul and the Jerusalem "pillars." If Paul and Peter and James were at such bitter odds, why would Paul have put such effort into carrying out their wishes? Georgi notes that Baur and the Tübingen theologians solved this seeming discrepancy, "by ascribing the initiating and the carrying out of the collection to Paul personally."[4] Georgi notes that the German theologian Karl Holl solved this problem in another way by positing that the collection "was a tax demanded by the leaders of the Jerusalem church corresponding to the traditional Jewish temple tax. Paul, on the other hand, tried to instill an entirely different meaning for the collection."

While the idea of the collection being a kind of Temple tax has not withstood the test of time, Georgi has run with the idea that Paul

imbued the collection with a deeper theological meaning, that the collection was of great theological importance to Paul for reasons that go beyond helping the needy in Jerusalem. Georgi points out that Holl, "was the first to realize that it had been the *eschatological expectation* that prompted the Jewish believers in Jerusalem to participate actively in promoting the plan" (italics mine). This idea has gained a lot of ground among scholars. As we noted earlier, part of the preeminence that the Jerusalem church enjoyed was due to its being at "ground zero"—the site of the expected Parousia of Jesus. It was here that the new eschatological Temple would be built over the ruins of the old Temple, which Jesus had predicted would be destroyed (see Mark 13). Thus it was that James, Peter, and John were considered the "pillars" of that coming eschatological Temple. In light of all this eschatological expectation, Jerusalem had deep theological significance for the early Christian community throughout the Mediterranean basin. Jerusalem was the Mother Church, and it is not at all hard to see why even the Gentile churches founded by Paul would pay heed to representatives from Jerusalem—which is, of course, what happened at Antioch and Galatia that so aggravated Paul.

There is also evidence that the believers in Jerusalem were called "the poor" not so much because of their economic status (which may well have been quite poor), but because of their eschatological status. "The poor" was actually a title of honor and respect, as Georgi explains:

> Being "the poor" appears to be the essential dignity held by the congregation in Jerusalem, to be granted and respected by all other Jesus congregations. The absolute use of this appellation in Galatians 2:10 and the fact that it does not need any explanation show that it must have been a title commonly bestowed upon that congregation . . .
>
> This titulary usage was modeled after other, previously existing . . . examples in the Jewish Bible. . . . the name "the poor" . . . is used synonymously with such designations as

> "pious" and "just" [think James]. Since the Maccabean wars [second century B.C.E.] . . . "the poor" had been used as a self-designation by a variety of Jewish groups, all of whom meant to express that they alone were the true devotees, the true Israel, the "Holy Remnant."[5]

Despite the religious prestige that the Jerusalem Christians enjoyed, they may also have been economically poor as well. We know that, in an interesting social experiment akin to modern socialism, the Jerusalem Christians gave all their possessions to the church and shared all things in common (see Acts 2:44–45). The Jerusalem missionaries did not hold jobs, but lived off charity, following the example of Jesus (see Mark 6:8–10). Therefore, the collection may well have been important for economic survival, but it was even more important theologically. The offerings of the Gentiles were no doubt seen by all as a sign that the eschatological Day of the Lord was at hand. As Georgi explains:

> Mount Zion and God's city were considered the goal of the forthcoming eschatological pilgrimage not only of the Jews but also of the nations of the world. The heathen peoples would come there and bring all the riches of the Earth to Jerusalem to pay homage to Yahweh and his people, and serve them.

Such an eschatological pilgrimage had been envisioned by prophets such as Isaiah and Micah, and is also reflected in the theology of the book of Revelation. Most pertinent is Isaiah's prophecy:

> *Nations shall come to your light,*
> *And kings to the brightness of your dawn.*
> *Lift up your eyes and look around;*
> *They all gather together. They come to you . . .*
>
> *Then you shall see and be radiant;*
> *your hearts shall thrill and rejoice,*
> *Because the abundance of the sea*

Shall be brought to you,
The wealth of nations shall come to you. (Isa. 60:3–5)

Certainly Paul thought of his mission to the Gentiles in such terms. His mission was the fulfilling of the ancient prophecies. It was with such weighty theological expectations that Paul looked upon the collection, and this was the source of his zeal for completing the collection and handing it to the Jerusalem leaders in person, with what he surely anticipated would be great fanfare and acclaim. Paul likely hoped that the delivering of the collection would heal all wounds and unite the Jewish and Gentile wings of the church, perhaps even usher in the return of Jesus. This is surely why he forged ahead to Jerusalem despite the warnings and misgivings of his companions.

Georgi also goes on to show that the use of the term "remembering" in association with "the poor" meant more than a monetary remembering. "Remembering the poor,"

> stipulated that the Gentile Jesus believers were to give recognition to the exemplary [ethical] performance on the part of their fellow believers in Jerusalem. In other words, the agreement was about the recognition of the Jerusalem congregation's ongoing and self-forgetful eschatological effort.[6]

Like their kindred community, the Essenes of Qumran, the Jerusalem Christians believed they could help to usher in the Day of the Lord by rigorously adhering to the Law, fulfilling for the entire Jewish community the righteousness that the majority of the people were not able to attain to. This understanding is seen in James's title, "the Just." In the next chapter we shall examine the evidence for the rigorous and ascetic lifestyle that James led.

No matter how one explains Luke's silence on the matter of Paul's delivery of the collection, or what significance it held for Paul or James, examining the topic forces us to confront the evidence that two Christian missions existed in the early church, and that the one with the greater prestige was the one led by James and the

Jerusalem Christians. This understanding begs us to ask larger, more provocative questions. As Professor Erik Heen of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia has asked:

> Did this exceptional eschatological status (based on a very particular role) demand a particularly "rigorous" orientation to the Law that was not a demand of Jewish Christian communities outside Jerusalem? Were the purity requirements different given this understanding of the *particular* eschatological significance of Jerusalem? (How else do you move from Jesus' rather "liberal" attitude towards the law . . . [to] the seemingly rigorist attitude of the Jerusalem "messianic" community?)[7]

In short, Heen cuts to the heart of our concerns in reevaluating James. How *does* one reconcile Jesus' seemingly free-spirited attitude toward the Law in the gospels with the seemingly rigorous, Pharisaic approach of James and the Jerusalem church? Following Georgi, Heen suggests that James and the Jerusalem community took a particularly rigorous approach to following the Law in light of their being the vanguard of the new eschatological community that God was establishing. It is for this same reason that the Essenes retreated to the desert commune at Qumran and practiced such strict asceticism and adherence to the Torah—to help usher in the Day of the Lord. As Heen suggests, this eschatological orientation of the Jerusalem church also provides an alternative way of understanding the purity requirements of the Apostolic Decree.

There are only two other possibilities. The first has been the church's traditional answer to the conundrum we are facing: James, the apostles, and the rest of the Jewish Christians began slowly but inexorably to fall back (or "backslide" as evangelical Christians like to put it) into their old strict observance of the Law because Jesus was no longer present to remind them that they need only believe in him to be saved. In this view, it is the "enlightened" Paul who takes up the new gospel of freedom from the Law that Jesus had directly entrusted to him and proclaims the "true gospel." It is based on this traditional Christian understanding that Paul's letter to the Galatians

has sometimes been referred to as the “Magna Carta” of Christian liberty.

The only other possibility is that Jesus may have been much more Law conformant than the Pauline tradition has led most Christians (and Protestants especially) to believe. This conclusion would, obviously, have revolutionary implications for the church’s traditional understanding of Jesus, but it is also where the evidence is inexorably leading us, and it is where we shall concentrate our efforts in the rest of this investigation. Further evidence for this working theory is to be found in the invaluable accounts of the famed Jewish historian Josephus.

THE DEATH OF A CHRISTIAN PHARISEE

Before bringing our account of James’s presence and activities in Jerusalem to a close, we must step outside of the New Testament for the first time and look at Josephus’ report of how James met his demise in Jerusalem. Apparently, James never lived anywhere else subsequent to Jesus’ death. Therefore, for at least thirty-two years—from the time of Jesus’ death until his own death, which can reliably be dated in 62, James was a permanent resident of Jerusalem.

Here is the tale of how James met his martyrdom as told by Josephus in his acclaimed history, the *Antiquities of the Jews*:

> Upon learning of the death of Festus [the Roman governor of Judea], Caesar sent Albinus to Judea as procurator. The king removed Joseph from the high priesthood, and bestowed the succession to this office upon the son of Ananus, who was likewise called Ananus . . . The younger Ananus . . . was rash in his temper and unusually daring. He followed the school of the Sadducees . . . Ananus thought that he had a favorable opportunity because Festus was dead and Albinus was still on the way. And so he convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be

> stoned. Those of the inhabitants of the city who were considered the most fair-minded and who were in strict observance of the law were offended at this. They therefore secretly sent to King Agrippa urging him . . . to order [Ananus] to desist from any further such actions . . . King Agrippa . . . deposed him from the high priesthood which he had held for three months and replaced him.[8]

In chapter 3, we considered John Dominic Crossan's hypothesis that James might have been a resident of Jerusalem even prior to Jesus' crucifixion. It is, in fact, Josephus' account of James's death that spurred Crossan to speculate along these lines. Why? Let us hear Crossan's fascinating commentary on this passage:

> Josephus tells us that Ananus was a Sadducee, but he was much more than that. His father, Ananus the Elder, was high priest from 6 to 15 C.E., and is known to us from the gospels as Annas. The elder Ananus was father-in-law of Joseph Caiaphas, High Priest from 18 to 36 C.E., a figure also known to us from the gospels [the priest who tried Jesus]. He was furthermore the father of five other High Priests . . . The immediate family of Ananus the Elder had dominated the high priesthood for most of the preceding decades, with eight high priests in sixty years, *yet the execution of James resulted in the deposition of Ananus the Younger after only three months in office.* An abstract illegality could hardly have obtained such a reaction, so *James must have had powerful, important, and even politically organized friends in Jerusalem.* Who were they? Josephus' phrase "inhabitants . . . who were in strict observance of the law" probably means Pharisees. *Was James a Pharisee?* . . . we need to think much more about James and how he reached such status among Jewish circles that, on the one hand, he had to be executed by a Sadducee and that, on the other, his death could cause a High Priest to be deposed after only three months in office.[9] (italics mine)

Now we are in a much better position to understand Crossan's conjecture. The events surrounding his death point to James having been an influential figure in Jerusalem even before Jesus began his ministry. Crossan goes on to ask:

> Did [James] leave Nazareth long before [Jesus' crucifixion] and become . . . involved within scribal circles in Jerusalem? Could his earlier presence there and Jesus' (single?) visit to Jerusalem be somehow connected . . . Above all, was he in Jerusalem long before Jesus' death, and did his presence there invite, provoke, challenge Jesus' only journey to Jerusalem?

While Crossan's speculations are indeed just that—speculations—it would be foolish not to at least keep these possibilities open. The hypothesis that James was a respected Pharisaic leader in Jerusalem even before Jesus' crucifixion goes a long way toward explaining many of the enigmas about James's presence and standing in Jerusalem that we have encountered.

In truth, it should not really surprise us that James could have been a prominent Pharisee. One of the few reliable outcomes of current historical Jesus scholarship has been the increased awareness that Jesus and the Pharisees were not the stalwart enemies that tradition has pictured them as being (as is exemplified in the work of E. P. Sanders and Geza Vermes). Rather, Jesus and the Pharisees were like-minded rabbis arguing fine points of legal interpretation. And let us not forget that Jesus was indeed a rabbi. The most common title by which he is addressed in the gospels is "teacher," which is a direct translation of the Aramaic word *Rabbouni* (Rabbi) in the Greek New Testament.

Already in the 1960s, an early James investigator by the name of Kenneth Carroll anticipated this growing trend in modern scholarship and saw its implications for James. Writing in 1961, Carroll's words could just as easily have been written last year:

> One of the great achievements of modern scholarship has been the establishment of the Pharisees as a group worthy of respect.

> Jesus was much closer to the Pharisees than to any other group in Jewish religious life. They represented the best in Judaism. Yet, at certain points, the Gospels show Jesus criticizing the Pharisees. Only in one or two instances does Jesus clearly criticize the Pharisaic interpretation of Scripture. In other cases he simply goes farther in the extension of privilege. Most of the Christian scholars who have worked on this problem . . . have suggested that Jesus was not attacking the Pharisees as a whole (since his own ethical and religious beliefs were almost wholly in agreement with theirs), but that he was attacking those Pharisees who took advantage of their position of authority to exploit or suppress the Jewish masses. . . .
>
> Some of the scholars . . . have suggested that the authors of the Gospels were more hostile to the Pharisees than Jesus himself was—so that our canonical Gospels possess a bias against this religious group.[10]

Of James's relation to the Pharisees, Carroll starkly concludes: "James . . . was a Christian Pharisee."

In fact, we would do well to consider whether both Jesus and James were Pharisees. Pharisaism is certainly the Jewish school of thought that lies closest to the teaching of Jesus, and it is important to keep in mind that the Pharisees were not a monolithic party. There were both liberal Pharisees (as exemplified by the school of Rabbi Hillel) and conservative Pharisees (exemplified by the school of Rabbi Shammai). Rabbis Hillel and Shammai both lived into the early decades of the first century, so it is quite possible that Jesus could have come under the influence of Hillel, and James could have fallen in with Shammai.

The difference between the two schools has been summarized in a classic rabbinical anecdote. The story goes that a Gentile asked the temperamental and strict Shammai to sum up the Torah "while standing on one foot":

> Appalled that anyone could be simple enough to imagine that the profundities of the Mosaic revelation could be articulated in a single phrase, Shammai sent the Gentile packing. Undaunted, the Gentile then went to Hillel with the same question. Taking the man's inquiry as sincere, Hillel is said to have replied: "Do not do to your neighbor what is hateful to yourself. That is the entire Torah. All the rest is commentary."[11]

It is interesting that, in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is also challenged to sum up the Law by a group of Pharisees (Matt. 22:34–40) and responds with a very similar answer: "You shall love you neighbor as yourself."

We should remember, too, that despite his well-known disagreements with the Pharisees, Jesus was friendly with many. It was while dining in the home of a Pharisee that a woman famously anoints Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36–49). Luke also records that it was a group of Pharisees who saved Jesus' life by tipping him off that Herod was seeking to kill him (13:31). On all major matters, Jesus and the Pharisees were in agreement. Unlike the Sadducees, Jesus and the Pharisees believed in the imminent eschaton (the end of the present age) and a final judgment; they believed in the resurrection of the dead and in the existence of angels and demons—all of which the Sadducees denied. Let us also not forget that *Paul* had been a Pharisee and had studied under the famous Pharisaic teacher, Gamaliel. It is intriguing that Acts records how Gamaliel defended and protected the early Jesus movement in Jerusalem (see Acts 5:33–39).

Finally, let us not forget that Matthew's gospel paints Jesus as virtually a spokesman for Pharisaism. Listen to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore,

> whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:17–20)

A more stirring defense of the Pharisees would be hard to find! Clearly, if one can remove the blinders of twenty centuries of Pauline influence, and some five centuries of Lutheran influence, the differences between Jesus and the Pharisees are few.

THE RISE OF PAULINE CHRISTIANITY

In our summary of part 1, we reached two conclusions:

1. There is nothing in the gospels that incontrovertibly shows opposition to Jesus by his family during his ministry.
2. Jesus' mother and brothers were followers of his ministry prior to the crucifixion.

In our investigation of James's role in the Jerusalem church in the last three chapters, we have seen nothing that would cause us to question these conclusions, and much, in fact, that further supports them. Therefore, onto the two initial conclusions, we can now add the following:

3. James was the leader of the Jerusalem church from its inception following Jesus' death and resurrection.
4. James's theological stance was that of Pharisaism. By implication, and as is attested by independent evidence, it is likely that Pharisaism was also the theology of Jesus.

Like Alfred Wegener's matching continental shorelines that were ignored for centuries, the evidence for these four propositions has

been staring out at us from the pages of the New Testament for almost two millennia. Quite simply put, James could not have become a believer *post*-resurrection: He would never have gained authority over Peter and the other apostles so quickly, especially if he had been a nonbeliever while Jesus was alive. Moreover, the fact that Peter and the other apostles did hand the reins of leadership to James after Jesus' death strongly suggests that James's teachings and sympathies were in line with Jesus' own.

Given this understanding, we must now ask how James's leadership role became so obscured that it was virtually unrecognizable until only recently. On this question, let us hear a word from John Painter that will set the tone for the third and final phase of our investigation:

> [I]t is clear that James was the leading figure in the Jerusalem church. In spite of this fact, Luke mentions him on only three occasions (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18). This is puzzling. [German scholar] Martin Hengel has described the presentation of James in the New Testament as one-sided and tendentious. Luke may have known of the martyrdom of James in the year 62 C.E. but chose not to mention the event because of the prestige attached to James as a martyr . . . [I]t is as if Luke has pushed James into the background, but, because of his prominence, has been unable to obscure totally his leading role. He sought to minimize the role of James because he was aware that James represented a hard-line position on the place of circumcision and the keeping of the law, a position that Luke himself did not wish to maintain.[12]

By the time that Luke wrote his two-part history of the church near the end of the first century, the church had largely been transformed from a Jewish phenomenon into a Gentile phenomenon. Therefore, the beliefs and teachings of James slowly were subsumed under the beliefs and teachings of Paul. This also led to a not-so-subtle prejudice against the thoroughly Jewish form of Christianity that the Jerusalem church and its leaders represented, which ultimately led

to the elision of James and the ostracizing of the Pharisees in the New Testament.

While James had unflagging zeal for the Law, it was Paul's relentless zeal for the mission to the Gentiles that won the day. Due almost single-handedly to Paul's ceaseless efforts, Christianity increasingly became a Gentile movement, and the importance of Jewish law naturally waned. There were also factors beyond either James's or Paul's control—namely, the Jewish revolt against Rome in the year 66 and the resultant sack of Jerusalem in 70, resulting in the second diaspora of the Jewish people. After 70, the Jewish form of Christianity that James had represented, and that was so thoroughly rooted in Jerusalem, found it difficult to survive in the Gentile world, while Paul's Gentile form of Christianity flourished and soon evolved into Christianity as we know it today.

The emerging Catholic Church quickly abandoned the dogmas associated with adherence to the Law, but it soon developed dogmas of its own to replace them, one of which was the doctrine of the virgin birth. With the rise of this doctrine, and especially with the growth of the belief in the *perpetual* virginity of Mary, James and the rest of Jesus' siblings became an embarrassment that needed to be hidden in the closet. Soon the memory of their importance, and even of their existence, was tragically lost.

But not lost by all. There were those who tended the memory of James and upheld his theology and teachings. It is to their tragic story that we now turn.

3

THE NATURE OF JEWISH CHRISTIANITY

6

KEEPING THE CANDLE BURNING: JAMES IN HISTORY AND TRADITION

> *James, whom the people of old called the Just because of his outstanding virtue, was the first, as the records tell us, to be elected to the Episcopal throne of the Jerusalem church.*
>
> EUSEBIUS, *ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY*

When one moves beyond the New Testament, literature about James becomes both surprisingly plentiful and surprisingly reverential. There are at least thirteen extra-biblical sources that treat of him. We have already examined the report of James's death from Josephus, almost unanimously considered historically trustworthy. While the other sources generally possess less historical reliability, at the very least they contain valuable information that shows how later generations of Jewish Christians, Gnostic Christians, Coptic Christians, and others managed, under some extremely difficult conditions, to keep the memory of James alive. Because all of these later reports about James are relatively brief, it is possible to offer the reader a comprehensive survey, which we shall now undertake as the last phase of our investigation.

Scholarly opinion about the historical reliability of the sources we will be examining falls all over the spectrum. So, unlike the prior phases of our investigation, here we shall for the most part lay aside the scholarly debate on the material. Instead, we shall simply let the accounts speak for themselves and see what historical nuggets we

can mine from this material based on the insights gleaned in parts 1 and 2. We turn first to our most plenteous source of information on James outside of the New Testament—the church father and historian Eusebius.

EUSEBIUS' *HISTORY OF THE CHURCH*

Eusebius was Bishop of Caesarea from 313–339. A careful historian, his *Ecclesiastical History* (a.k.a. *History of the Church* and hereafter abbreviated by the standard Latin abbreviation *HE*) was written between 300 and 324 and is one of the very first historical works to contain citations of sources. Eusebius relies heavily on the earlier work of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215, a later Clement than Clement of Rome), Hippolytus (c. 170–236, the most important third-century theologian of the Roman church), and Hegesippus (a second-century church historian who was a converted Jew). In Eusebius, as in almost all of the non-canonical literature, we find exalted terminology used in reference to James. As we have already seen, it is in this text that James is often referred to as the "Bishop of the Church," and is even called the "Brother of God" (Greek *adelphotheos*), perhaps a not-unexpected usage in light of Mary being called the "Mother of God" by this time. In English translations, the near-divinity implied in the epithet "the Brother of God" is, not surprisingly, toned down as "the brother of *the Lord*."

It is Eusebius' belief, based on his sources, that the twelve apostles elected James as the first bishop of the church after Christ's ascension to heaven. John Painter notes that, "Eusebius provides no evidence of any implied early leadership of Peter . . . Eusebius asserts the leadership of James more or less from the beginning."[1] To wit, in the second chapter of the *Ecclesiastical History,* Eusebius tells us:

> Then there was James, who was called the Lord's brother; for he too was named Joseph's son . . . This James, whom the people of old called the Just because of his outstanding virtue, was the first, as the records tell us, to be elected to the Episcopal throne

of the Jerusalem church. Clement, in *Outlines,* book six, puts it thus:

> "After the ascension of the savior, Peter, James, and John [the brothers James and John, sons of Zebedee] did not claim pre-eminence because the savior had specifically honored them, but chose James the Just as Bishop of Jerusalem."

In book seven of the same work the writer makes this further statement:

> "James the Just, John, and Peter were entrusted by the Lord after his resurrection with the higher knowledge. They imparted it to the other apostles, and the other apostles to the Seventy, one of whom was Barnabas. There were two Jameses, one the Just, who was thrown down from the parapet and beaten to death with a fuller's club, the other the James who was beheaded."

James the Just is also mentioned by Paul when he writes, "Of the other apostles I saw no one except James the brother of the Lord." (*HE* 2.1.2–5; Williamson translation)

The first item of note here is Eusebius' statement that "the people of old" called James "the Just because of his outstanding virtue." How far back the use of "the Just" as an appellation for James goes is difficult to say. While it does not appear in the New Testament, it was obviously already traditional at the time Eusebius wrote. We shall encounter it many more times in our survey. "James the Just" has in fact survived down to our own times as the most common appellation for James.

CLEMENT'S *OUTLINES*

While Clement's *Outlines* (*Hypostases* in Greek), which Eusebius used as a source, has sadly not survived, there is no reason not to trust Eusebius' citation of it. The real question here is the reliability of

Clement. Clement's writings are from the early third century, and scholarly opinion on their historical reliability is divided.

There are three items in the citations from Clement that are debatable. First, while the use of the term *bishop* is almost certainly a retrojection of a term in use in Eusebius' day, there is, as we have seen, no reason to dismiss the very real possibility that James was indeed chosen to lead the community of believers after Jesus' ascension. John Painter's well-considered arguments impel us, at the very least, to not rule out the possibility.

The second item that raises an eyebrow is Clement's claim of "higher knowledge" being imparted to the three pillar apostles, a claim that sounds remarkably Gnostic in flavor. The Gnostics were an early Christian sect that taught that salvation was attained through the acquiring of secret knowledge (*gnosis* in the Greek) that Jesus had entrusted to only a few. For obvious reasons, Gnosticism became one of the first heresies that the emerging Catholic Church battled against. Yet despite his talk about "higher knowledge," Clement himself was actually a staunch defender of emerging Catholic orthodoxy against the growing tide of Gnosticism. Here we actually see Clement using a defensive approach that his student Origen would later use to great effect—taking over Gnostic language and terminology in order to use it against the claims of the Gnostics.

Another common feature of Gnostic literature is the elevation of James over Peter and Paul, which is also a common feature of the Jewish Christian writings we will be examining shortly. Clement, therefore, was apparently careful to assert that James's leadership was the result of the apostles giving authority to James. In other words, James's leadership was not a matter of dynastic succession, nor was it a case of Jesus himself handing the reins of leadership to his brother, both of which were common claims of the Gnostic and Jewish Christian groups Clement opposed. That Clement's agenda was taken up by Eusebius becomes apparent in two further remarks that Eusebius makes:

> [The Jews] turned against James, the brother of the Lord, to whom the throne of the bishopric in Jerusalem had been allotted by the apostles. (HE 2.23.1; italics mine)

> James . . . was the first to receive from the savior and the apostles the episcopate of the church at Jerusalem. (HE 7.19.1)

In the latter item, Eusebius asserts that the "episcopate" was given to James by Jesus *and* the apostles. Here Eusebius may be drawing from a different, unnamed source, or more likely, he had no need to carefully omit Jesus from the event because the struggle against Gnostic and Jewish Christian heresy was no longer a burning issue when he wrote. Or perhaps Eusebius' attention simply lapsed for a moment.

At any rate, what is most striking here is that Eusebius does not dispute the priority of James—it was obviously accepted as fact in the early 300s. If this is the case—and all the evidence we have seen supports it—then the knowledge of James's leadership role was either distorted or suppressed sometime later on. Indeed, the obfuscation of James's role was the result of the later church's efforts (beginning with the Council of Nicaea in 325) to officially establish what was orthodoxy and what was heresy, one major factor of which was the status of Jesus' brothers and sisters vis-à-vis the emerging dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary.

The third item of note in the citations from Clement is the claim that James was martyred by being "thrown down from the parapet [of the Temple] and beaten to death with a fuller's [laundryman's] club." This is a bit different from Josephus' account which says that James was stoned to death. It is possible that Clement was drawing on an alternate tradition that was independent of Josephus. If Clement was aware of Josephus' account, he either deemed this alternate account more reliable or had a particular (perhaps polemical) reason for using it. John Painter theorizes:

> Perhaps stoning implied a more lawful execution than Clement wished to portray . . . Even so, the use of the club is somewhat

> puzzling. Given that there is a tendency [in Eusebius] to portray James as a priest or even a high priest (see *HE* 2.23.6), it is possible that the punishment was specifically related to some supposed priestly offense. According to [Jewish law], a priest performing Temple service while unclean was to be taken out of the Temple court by the young priests and his skull was to be split with clubs.[2]

The notion that James was a Temple priest is another one of those startling things that jumps out from the noncanonical literature and grabs you. While the idea may at first seem patently absurd, Eusebius actually goes on to report it in detail. But first, Eusebius provides some other surprising details concerning the death of James.

EUSEBIUS AND THE DEATH OF JAMES

Referring to the failed attempt on Paul's life in Acts 21, Eusebius makes the claim that "the Jews" next plotted the death of James:

> When Paul appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome by Festus the Jews were disappointed of the hope in which they had laid their plot against him and turned against James the brother of the Lord, who had been elected to the Episcopal throne of Jerusalem by the apostles. This is the crime that they committed against him. They brought him into their midst and in the presence of all the people demanded a denial of his belief in Christ. But when, contrary to all expectation, he spoke as he liked and showed undreamt of fearlessness in the face of the enormous throng, declaring that our savior and Lord Jesus was the son of God, they could not endure his testimony any longer, since he was universally regarded as the most righteous of men because of the heights of philosophy and religion which he had scaled in his life. So they killed him, using anarchy as an opportunity for power since at that moment Festus had died in Judaea, leaving the province without governor or procurator. How James died has already been shown by the words of Clement already quoted,

> narrating that he was thrown down from the parapet and clubbed to death. (*HE* 2.23.1–3)

Eusebius was apparently either familiar with Josephus' account (note his reference to James's death occurring in the period between governors) or drew on an independent source. If he knew Josephus' account, he apparently preferred Clement's version of James's execution either because he believed it more reliable or because he found it more theologically agreeable.

Another item of note here is Eusebius' claim that James was "universally regarded as the most righteous of men because of the heights of philosophy and religion which he had scaled in his life." This is an unexpected claim in light of the traditional understanding of Jesus and his family as relatively uneducated. That James and Jesus could have been highly educated is certainly not implausible, but it is also possible that Eusebius is merely trying to make James appealing to his Greco-Roman readers.[*15]

Eusebius notes that of all his sources, "the most detailed account of [James] is given by Hegesippus," and indeed we gain some remarkable information from Eusebius' extracts:

> Control of the church passed together with the apostles, to the brother of the Lord James, whom every one from the Lord's time till our own has named the Just, for there were many Jameses, but this one was holy from his birth; he drank no wine or intoxicating liquor and ate no animal food; no razor came near his head; he did not smear himself with oil, and he 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. 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 Just and *Oblias*—in Greek "Bulwark of the people and Righteousness"—fulfilling the declarations of the prophets regarding him.

Representatives of the seven [Jewish] sects already described by me asked him what was meant by “the door of Jesus,” and he replied that Jesus was the Savior. Some of them came to believe that Jesus was the Christ: the sects mentioned above did not believe either in a resurrection or in one who is coming to give every man what his deeds deserve, but those who did come to believe did so because of James. Since therefore many even of the ruling class believed, there was an uproar among the Jews and scribes and Pharisees, who said there was a danger that the entire people would expect Jesus as the Christ. So they collected and said to James: “Be good enough to restrain the people, for they have gone astray after Jesus in the belief that he is the Christ. Be good enough to make the facts about Jesus clear to all who come for the Passover Day . . . So make it clear to the crowd that they must not go astray as regards Jesus: the whole people and all of us accept what you say. So take your stand on the Temple parapet, so that from that height you may easily be seen, and your words audible to the whole people. For because of the Passover all the tribes have come together, and the Gentiles too.”

So the scribes and Pharisees made James stand on the Sanctuary parapet and shouted to him: “Just one, whose word we are all obliged to accept, the people are all going astray after Jesus who was crucified; so tell us what is meant by ‘the door of Jesus.’” He replied as loudly as he could: “Why do you question me about the Son of Man? I tell you, he is sitting in heaven at the right hand of the great power, and he will come on the clouds of heaven.” Many were convinced and gloried in James’s testimony, crying: “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Then again the scribes and Pharisees said to each other: “We made a bad mistake in affording such testimony to Jesus. We had better go up and throw him down, so that they will be frightened and not believe him.” “Ho, ho!” they called out, “even the Just one has gone astray!”—fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah: “‘Let us remove the

Just one, for he is unprofitable to us.' Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their works."

So they went up and threw down the Just one. Then they said to each other, "Let us stone James the Just," and began to stone him, as in spite of his fall he was still alive. But he turned and knelt, uttering the words: "I beseech thee, Lord God and Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing." While they pelted him with stones, one of the descendants of Rechab the son of Rechabim—the priestly family to which Jeremiah the prophet bore witness, called out, "Stop! What are you doing? The Just one is praying for you." Then one of them, a fuller, took the club which he used to beat clothes, and brought it down on the head of the Just one. Such was his martyrdom. He was buried on the spot, by the Sanctuary, and his headstone is still there by the Sanctuary. He has proved a true witness to Jews and Gentiles alike that Jesus is the Christ.

Immediately after this Vespasian began to besiege them. (*HE* 2.23.3–18)

Eusebius is quoting here from the *Memoranda* (*Hypomneumata* in Greek) of Hegesippus, and we can plainly see his reliance on his source. However, while the *Memoranda* is generally dated 150–180 (bringing us much closer to apostolic times than Eusebius' own work), it is obvious that some of Hegesippus' account is largely legendary. Ultimately, what is claimed here about James depends on the reliability of Hegesippus.

Hegesippus' reporting is so detailed that initially one is inclined to consider it factual, especially as much of what Hegesippus describes fits what we have already learned about James. There are, however, several problematic items, such as James praying for forgiveness for his persecutors in the exact words of Jesus: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing." While this anecdote is likely legendary, it is at least possible that James might have chosen to die repeating the famous prayer that his brother prayed for his accusers at his death. Unlike Eusebius, Hegesippus did not cite his sources. It

is possible he drew on Josephus for the details of James being stoned, but he apparently combined Josephus with a tradition, which Clement also knew, of James being thrown down from the parapet and beaten with a fuller's club.

The overall tone of Hegesippus is clearly Jewish Christian. He describes James in terms that make him appear to be a Nazirite, claiming that James "was holy from his birth; he drank no wine or intoxicating liquor and ate no animal food; no razor came near his head." These are the promises of the Nazirite vow (see Numbers 6), and Nazirites were sometimes dedicated at birth by their parents, such as was the case with the Israelite Judge Samson of "Samson and Delilah" fame (see Judges 13). The overall description of James's ascetic behavior betrays the Jewish Christian origins of this passage. Nevertheless, none of what Hegesippus says is actually unacceptable. In fact, it all accords well with Luke's depiction, in Acts 21, of James as someone with close Nazirite affinities.

What is most surprising (and dubious) in Hegesippus is his claim that James was a high priest, able to enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. While this may seem patently absurd, it is not impossible. We saw James's close ties to the Temple in Acts, and we know from Josephus of the sympathy that leading Jews in Jerusalem had for James. There is also a genuine element of veracity in Hegesippus' assertion that James was buried "by the Sanctuary, and his headstone is still there by the Sanctuary," which would be something verifiable by Hegesippus' readers, leading one to conclude that James was in fact buried there.[*16] And surely not just anyone would be buried near the Temple—certainly not someone who was considered a heretic by his fellow Jews. The only conclusion would seem to be that James was considered orthodox by the Temple priests and was a respected Jewish leader as well. A priest? Not at all implausible. A high priest? Quite unlikely, but not completely outside the realm of possibility. That James was a priest assigned to the Temple would account for his being the only key apostle never to conduct missionary journeys. In fact, in all the accounts we have of James, he is always in Jerusalem.

Eusebius himself did not doubt Hegesippus' reliability, asserting that he was in fact a Jewish Christian who used the *Gospel of the Hebrews* (an apocryphal Jewish Christian gospel we shall examine later) as a source and calling his account of the martyrdom of James the "most accurate" and "most careful" (2.23.3), more accurate even than Josephus'. The majority of modern scholars, however, consider Hegesippus' account to be largely legendary. As we have seen, Josephus associates James with the Pharisees (as do several modern scholars) which would make a priestly James unlikely, since it was the Sadducees who oversaw the Temple and the priests. The Pharisees were in strong opposition to the Sadducean leaders, perceiving them as being in league with Rome.

Another discrepancy that brings Hegesippus into question is that he concludes that it was immediately after James's death that the Roman siege of Jerusalem under Vespasian began; however, we have the rather firm evidence from Josephus that James died in 62, and the siege of Jerusalem did not begin until 67. What we likely see here in this anachronism is a common feature of the Jewish Christian writings—to make the death of James the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem. In fact, Hegesippus' use of the term *Oblias* (bulwark) may hint at the Jewish Christian belief that the Roman attack had been divinely forestalled until after James's death. Eusebius provides a concluding summary to the Hegesippus account, which states this explicitly:

> This account is given at length by Hegesippus, but in agreement with Clement. Thus it seems that James was indeed a remarkable man and famous among all for righteousness, so that the wise even of the Jews thought that this was the cause of the siege of Jerusalem immediately after his martyrdom, and that it happened for no other reason than the crime they had committed against him. (*HE* 2.23.19)

Of course, "immediately" can be a relative term, especially when one is writing decades (Hegesippus) or centuries (Eusebius) later; but Eusebius goes on to claim that Josephus (who was *not* writing a long

time after) also believed that the siege of Jerusalem was caused by the death of James:

> And indeed Josephus did not hesitate to write this down in so many words: “These things happened to the Jews to avenge James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus who is called Christ, for the Jews put him to death in spite of his great righteousness.” (*HE* 2.23.20)

Unfortunately, this quote is not extant in the existing manuscripts of Josephus. This might seem to throw Eusebius’ own reliability into question, especially as the purported words of Josephus echo the Jewish-Christian line. However, Eusebius immediately regains his credibility by quoting in full and without any deviation Josephus’ account of James’s martyrdom as it appears in the *Antiquities of the Jews* (2.23.21–24). Eusebius then concludes his discussion:

> Such is the story of James, to whom is attributed the first of the “general” epistles. Admittedly, its authenticity is doubted, since few early writers refer to it, any more than to “Jude’s,” which is also one of the seven called general. But the fact remains that these two, like the others, have been regularly used in very many churches. (*HE* 2.23.24–25)

Here Eusebius shows that in his day the authenticity of the two letters attributed to brothers of Jesus was in doubt.[*17] After the reference to Jude, Eusebius considers the rest of Jesus’ brothers and their descendants, simply fascinating material that we shall examine in a moment. But, first, there are a few odds and ends to note.

After this detailed look at James, there are only a few scattered references to him in the rest of the *Ecclesiastical History*. One is a summary of the early Christian martyrdoms:

> After the ascension of our savior, the Jews had followed up their crime against him by devising plot after plot against his apostles.

> First they stoned Stephen to death; then James the son of Zebedee and brother of John was beheaded; and finally James, the first after our savior's ascension to be appointed to the bishop's throne there, lost his life in the way described, while the remaining apostles, in constant danger from murderous plots, were driven out of Judaea. (*HE* 3.5.2–3)

Here again Eusebius asserts that James held the first bishop's "throne" in Jerusalem.

Later, Eusebius states unequivocally that it was James's presence that held off the Roman siege, but links the siege to Jesus' death rather than to James's:

> After the savior's passion . . . disaster befell the entire nation . . . But . . . certain facts bring home the beneficence of all gracious providence, which for forty years after the crime against Christ delayed their destruction. All that time most of the apostles and disciples, including James himself, the first bishop of Jerusalem, known as the Lord's brother, were still alive, and by remaining in the city furnished the place with an impregnable bulwark. (*HE* 3.7.7–9)

Despite Eusebius' earlier citation of Josephus, which laid the blame for the siege on the death of James, here he asserts that it was due to Jesus' death. It seems as though Eusebius wants to make the crucifixion the actual cause of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, but has a hard time doing so because of the large interval of time (about forty years) between the two events. Therefore, he upholds the idea that it was the presence of James and the apostles that was responsible for a four-decade delay in what would otherwise have been the immediate destruction of Jerusalem as divine retribution for the crucifixion of Jesus.

DYNASTIC SUCCESSION

Eusebius' account of the early martyrs also presents intriguing evidence that the leadership of the Jerusalem church may have

been a matter of dynastic succession:

> After the martyrdom of James and the capture of Jerusalem which instantly followed, there is a firm tradition that those of the apostles and disciples of the Lord who were still alive assembled from all parts together with those who, humanly speaking, were kinsmen of the Lord—for most of them were still living and they all took counsel together concerning whom they should judge worthy to succeed James and to the unanimous tested approval it was decided that Symeon, son of the Clopas, mentioned in the gospel narrative, was worthy to occupy the throne of the Jerusalem see. He was, so it is said, a cousin of the savior, for Hegesippus relates that Clopas was the brother of Joseph. (*HE* 3.11.1)

It is interesting that Eusebius upholds this account as "a firm tradition," rather admitting that there were other traditions that were not as reliable. This, however, was firm: that Jesus' family and disciples held an assembly following the siege to choose a successor to James. That they chose Symeon the son of Clopas, who was a cousin to Jesus, has caused some scholars to see a dynastic succession at work here.

Eusebius then relates stories about the descendants of Jesus' family. Most notably, he states that Hegesippus recorded how, after the siege of Jerusalem, the Roman emperor Vespasian inflicted great persecution on many Jews in the course of a search he conducted to find those who were of the house of David. When referring to the relatives of Jesus, Eusebius uses the term *desposynoi* (those who belong to the Master), a word he took over from the early historian Julius Africanus and that has remained standard scholarly jargon for Jesus' family to this day. Later, Eusebius records another such search for *desposynoi* by the emperor Domitian, who reigned from 81 to 96:

> Domitian ordered the execution of all who were of the family of David, and there is an old and firm tradition that a group of

heretics accused the descendants of Jude—the brother, according to the flesh, of the savior—alleging that they were of the family of David and related to Christ himself. Hegesippus relates this as follows:

> Now there still survived of the family of the Lord the grandsons of Jude—who was said to be his brother according to the flesh—and they were informed against as being of the family of David. These the *evocatus* [official] brought before Domitian Caesar. For he was afraid of the coming of Christ as Herod also. He asked them if they were descended from David and they admitted it. Then he asked them how much property they owned or how much money they controlled. They replied that they possessed only nine thousand *denarii* between them, half belonging to each, and this, they said, was not available in cash but was the estimated value of only thirty nine *plethora* [about a half acre] of land on which they paid their taxes and lived on by their work.

They showed him their hands, putting forward as proof of their toil the hardness of their bodies. . . .

On hearing this Domitian did not condemn them but despised them as simple folk, released them, and decreed an end to the persecution against the church. When they were released they were the leaders of the churches, both because of their testimony and because they were of the family of the Lord and remained alive in peace which lasted until Trajan. This we learn from Hegesippus. (*HE* 3.19.1–3.20.7)

Eusebius later relates another story about the grandsons of Jude in the time of the emperor Trajan (98–117), and tells of the martyrdom of Symeon, the successor to James:

> [O]ther descendants of one of the so-called brothers of the savior named Jude lived on into the same reign [of Trajan] after they had given, in the time of Domitian, the testimony in behalf of the

faith of Christ already recorded of them. [Hegesippus] writes thus:

> Consequently they came and presided over every church, as witnesses and members of the family of the Lord, and since profound peace came to every church they survived until the time of Trajan Caesar, until the time of the son of the Lord's uncle, the aforesaid Simon the son of Clopas, was similarly accused by the sects on the same charge before Atticus the consular. He was tortured for many days and gave his witness so that all, even the consular, were astounded that at the age of one hundred and twenty he could endure it, and he was ordered to be crucified. (*HE* 3.32.1–6)

Obviously, there are legendary elements here, such as the claim that Symeon lived to be 120 years old,[*18] but both John Painter and Richard Bauckham consider the accounts of Jesus' family found in Eusebius to be essentially reliable.[3] Painter highlights the importance of this material for our understanding of James:

> The continuing importance of the family of Jesus in the Jerusalem church and indeed in the churches at large . . . depended on the recognition of members of the human family of Jesus. Reservations about leaders being part of the family belong more to the time of Eusebius, and qualification [e.g., "so-called"] is normally present in those passages composed by him, even when he is summarizing sources from which it is absent. The qualification is generally absent from quotations from Hegesippus . . . For the early church, two centuries before Eusebius, the important issue for leadership was membership in the family of Jesus, a position that would be destroyed by the denial of the reality of that relationship.[4]

What Painter emphasizes here is that the dynastic succession claimed by Hegesippus and Eusebius is indeed historical, and that

this dynastic succession was being downplayed and suppressed by the Catholic Church of Eusebius' day. Painter concludes:

> This view is consistent with our reading of the New Testament evidence. The link with the family of Jesus runs against the theological tendencies affirming his unique significance. The emerging orthodoxy of the early church tended to isolate Jesus from all but Mary, his virgin mother.[5]

In other words, the fact that the stories of Jesus' brothers and their descendants relayed by Hegesippus and Eusebius are in conflict with the emerging belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary validates their authenticity.

Gerd Lüdemann, along with a majority of scholars, is skeptical of such claims. Lüdemann does not think that there was any actual Davidic descent in the family of Jesus:

> In my opinion, the claim to Davidic descent for the grandsons of Jude can only be considered to be redactional [the creation of Hegesippus or Eusebius]. At the time the story was composed (the beginning of the second century), Davidic sonship was already an element of christological doctrine . . .[6]

In other words, any claim that Jesus or his family were *actually* of Davidic descent is fictional. Lüdemann holds that all such references in the New Testament, or any other early Christian literature, are the creation of the early church. Painter, however, specifically rebuts Lüdemann:

> It is sometimes claimed that the Davidic messianic motif fits the agenda of the early church and probably does not belong to the early tradition. But there is independent evidence of messianic activity among the Jews, and, at least in the second of the two [Jewish] wars, Symeon bar Kochba was perceived by both sides to be a messianic leader.[7]

Painter is here referring to the second revolt of the Jews against Rome, the so-called bar Kochba revolt (132–135 C.E.). Bar Kochba and many other messianic pretenders claimed Davidic descent in order to bolster their claims, and what Painter is pointing out is that Davidic descent was a prerequisite for anyone claiming to be the Messiah. Being of the line of David was a universal Jewish expectation based on the everlasting covenant that God made with David—that a Davidic descendant would reign as Messiah forever. It is therefore difficult to agree with Lüdemann and so many others who claim that the Davidic descent of Jesus is purely a creation of the early church. One of the few solid conclusions of current historical Jesus research is the increasing recognition that Jesus was indeed crucified by the Romans for sedition and treason—for claiming to be "the King of the Jews," as the official charge against Jesus read on the placard that Pilate ordered attached to his cross. This is the source of the ancient Christian symbol INRI, the Latin abbreviation for *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum*—Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. If this biblical account is historical, that placard speaks volumes about the true identity of Jesus.

The person who has done the most in-depth research into the matter of the *desposynoi* is conservative scholar Richard Bauckham. He takes the middle ground and summarizes the debate thus:

> The observation that not only James, but also other members of the family of Jesus were prominent in the leadership of the churches of Palestine down to at least the early second century prompted a series of scholars from Harnack to Schoeps to speak of a Christian "caliphate" or of a dynastic form of Christianity . . . This thesis of a dynastic succession in Palestinian Jewish Christianity was strongly attacked by von Campenhausen, whose article provoked an equally strong defence and reaffirmation of the thesis by Stauffer.
>
> Our investigation . . . allows us to acknowledge some truth in the arguments of both von Campenhausen and Stauffer. The thesis of a strictly dynastic succession cannot be maintained, but

> it has to be admitted that the family relationship to Jesus played some part in the prominence of the *desposynoi* in the leadership of the Palestinian churches.[8]

While acknowledging where the evidence is pointing, Bauckham is more hesitant to accept the conclusion to which that evidence points than is the more liberal Painter. Here again we see the "matching coastline" factor at work. All the evidence points to the importance of Jesus' family both during his ministry and after his death, but scholars, like scientists, are in general inherently resistant to accepting new paradigms.

Eusebius actually supplies a complete list of the bishops of the Jerusalem church and attests to the thoroughgoing Jewishness of their leadership, a bit of candor quite remarkable for the (anti-Semitic) time in which Eusebius wrote:

> All are said to be Hebrews in origin . . . at that time their whole church consisted of Hebrew believers who had continued from apostolic times down to the later siege in which the Jews . . . were overwhelmed in a full-scale war.
>
> As this meant an end to the bishops of the circumcision, it is now necessary to give their names from the first. The *first* then was James who was called the Lord's brother; after whom Symeon was *second;* Justus third; Zacchaeus fourth; fifth Tobias; sixth Benjamin; John seventh; eighth Matthias; ninth Philip; tenth Seneca; eleventh Justus; Levi twelfth; Ephres thirteenth; fourteenth Joseph; and last, fifteenth Judas. Such were the bishops in the city of Jerusalem from the apostles down to the time mentioned; they were all of the circumcision. (*HE* 4.5.1–4)

The length of Eusebius' list of bishops causes most scholars to doubt the list's veracity because the Jerusalem church as such likely came to an end after the second Jewish revolt (132–135), which resulted in the banning of Jews from Jerusalem. Some scholars speculate that the list might actually be a sequential catalog of those who replaced the original twelve apostles as they were successively

martyred, but it is likely that the “Jerusalem” church continued in Pella or elsewhere and that Eusebius lists the leaders there.

Unfortunately, in a bitter irony, the very thing that tied the Jerusalem church to Jesus’ family—“they were all of the circumcision”—proved to be its undoing, as we shall see. The most significant factor was the loss of Jerusalem itself. Eusebius goes on to say that after the final Roman siege in the time of the emperor Hadrian, Jerusalem became a Gentile city (*HE* 4.6.4).

Later, Eusebius makes one final mention of James:

> Now the throne of James, who was the first to receive from the savior and the apostles the episcopate of the Jerusalem church and who was called a brother of Christ, as the divine books show, has been preserved to this day; and by the honor that the brethren in succession pay there to it, they show clearly to all the reverence in which the holy men were and still are held by the men of old time and those in our day, because of the love shown them by God. (HE 7.19.1)

Eusebius is apparently referring to an actual physical throne that was believed to have belonged to James. While the authenticity of such a holy relic seems unlikely, that such an object was believed in Eusebius’ day to have belonged to James, and was venerated as such, is not at all unlikely. In fact, this throne is claimed to be the one that is preserved in the Armenian cathedral of St. James in Jerusalem to this day.

Another item of note here is the reverence that was paid to James even in the time of Eusebius, when the church had long been a Gentile form of Christianity. As mentioned earlier, James’s suppression clearly came at a later time.[*19] We noted earlier that Eusebius states that the “episcopate” was given to James by both Jesus *and* the apostles. Again, this emphasis was likely put forth to counter the claim in both Gnostic Christian and Jewish Christian circles that the risen Lord appeared first to James, not Peter. John Painter notes that

> Eusebius, like Clement, was conscious of a tradition that elevated James the Just in order to subvert apostolic succession. That alternative tradition is found in the Nag Hammadi documents that honor James . . . as well as in the [Jewish Christian] works . . . Clement and Eusebius were unwilling to give James up and attempted to reclaim him by placing him under the umbrella of apostolic authority.[9]

Here we see that there were those (mainly Gnostic and Jewish Christians) who early on were opposed to the idea of apostolic succession. In their eyes, succession to the leadership of the church was based on family ties—on dynastic, not apostolic, succession. It is to these pesky Gnostic and Jewish Christians that we turn next in our investigation.

7

THE BROTHER OF GOD: JAMES, GNOSTICISM, AND JEWISH CHRISTIANITY

The disciples said to Jesus, "We know that you are going to leave us. Who will be our leader?" Jesus said to them, "No matter where you are, you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being."

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS, LOGION 12 (SV)

By chance, in the year 1945, an Egyptian farmer unearthed what is perhaps the most important biblical archaeological discovery of modern times. While digging for natural fertilizer in the town of Nag Hammadi, Mohammad Ali and his brother discovered an ancient pottery jar that contained within it thirteen leather-bound books made of papyrus (called *codices* by scholars). The Nag Hammadi library, as these books have come to be called, contains more than fifty individual works, mainly alternative Christian gospels and other writings that were not included in the final canon of the New Testament. The Nag Hammadi codices are almost all written in the Coptic language and are translations from original Greek documents. They include titles such as the *Gospel of Truth*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*, and the *Apocalypse of Peter*. Most pertinent to our concerns are the *Apocryphon of James (AJ),* the *First Apocalypse of James (FAJ),* the *Second Apocalypse of James (SAJ),* and the now famous *Gospel of Thomas (GT)*. All of these writings exhibit the theological beliefs of

the early Christian sect known as the Gnostics, who, as we saw earlier, believed that Jesus transmitted secret teaching to certain apostles.

THE *GOSPEL OF THOMAS*

The most well-known of the Nag Hammadi texts is the *Gospel of Thomas*, which an increasing number of scholars believe may be as old as the canonical gospels. Some scholars see Thomas as a legitimate "fifth gospel," although it is quite different in nature from the four canonical gospels. Thomas is made up entirely of individual sayings of Jesus with no connecting narrative. The hypothetical document called "Q" (from the German *quelle*—"source"), which almost all scholars have long held to be one of the sources used by Matthew and Luke as the basis for their gospels, is, interestingly, also believed to have been entirely a collection of Jesus' sayings. A few scholars are wondering if the *Gospel of Thomas* might in fact *be* the missing Q document. Whatever the case may be, what has attracted the public's attention is that many of the sayings in Thomas are not found in the canonical gospels. Could they really be authentic lost sayings of Jesus? An increasing number of scholars think that at least some of them are.

Pertinent to our concerns is a single reference to James in the *Gospel of Thomas:* logion, or saying, 12, quoted above. Here we clearly have a rival tradition to that found in the canonical gospels, a tradition that portrays James as the leader of the apostles rather than Peter. What is especially significant is that the *Gospel of Thomas* is not a Jewish Christian writing, but a Gnostic one. So we know that two traditions outside the mainstream claimed priority for James. Is it possible that the canonical gospels have it wrong?

The *Gospel of Thomas* not only elevates James over Peter, but also elevates Thomas, for whom the gospel is named. In logion 13 (immediately following the James logion) there is an astounding parallel to the famous canonical story at Caesarea Philippi where Jesus questions the disciples as to who people believe he is. In the synoptic gospels, Peter gives his famous response, "You are the

Messiah!" (Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–21; Matthew 16:13–20). In Matthew, Jesus then designates Peter as the "rock" on which he will build his church, and this single statement has been the underlying source for the Roman Catholic Church's claim to apostolic authority to this day.

Strikingly, in logion 13 of the *Gospel of Thomas*, it is *Thomas* who gives the correct response, while Peter incorrectly identifies Jesus as an angel! Jesus then takes Thomas aside and reveals three secret teachings to him alone. This is the basis for the claim made in the opening of the *Gospel of Thomas*: "These are the secret sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Judas Thomas the Twin recorded."[1] The Gnostic Christians believed that Thomas the Twin (as he is called in the canonical gospels) was actually the twin brother of Jesus. While this sounds outlandish to modern ears, it was a common belief of a significant number of early Christians, derived from two facts: Thomas was known to be a twin, and his first name was Judas. According to the *Gospel of Thomas*, some early Christians identified this Judas with Jesus' brother Judas (also known as Jude). While their understandings may have been mistaken, the Gnostic writings clearly demonstrate that more than one early Christian community gave priority to the brothers of Jesus.

The handing on of the reins of leadership to James in logion 12 bears one significant difference from Clement's depiction of it in the account preserved in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. There, as we saw, both Jesus *and* the apostles hand the reins to James. In Thomas, it is Jesus alone who directs the apostles to James as their leader. Most striking is the exalted language used of James: "for whose sake heaven and earth came into being." John Painter notes that such language should not necessarily be all that surprising, for this is actually, "an expression which is comparable to other sayings concerning 'the righteous,' including Abraham and the patriarchs generally, Moses, David, and the Messiah, as well as Israel as a whole."[2] Painter refers to examples such as 2 Baruch 14:19—"the world was created for the righteous" (the words "righteous" and "just" are interchangeable).

Painter concludes of the evidence in Thomas: “The recognition of the leadership of James and the veneration of the family of Jesus signal that this tradition originated in a form of Jewish Christianity with a continuing memory of the role of Jesus and his family.”[3] This trend in Jewish Christianity is everywhere evident in the Gnostic literature.

THE *APOCRYPHON OF JAMES*

The *Apocryphon* (Secret Book) *of James* was actually known before its discovery at Nag Hammadi. This lost work was first brought to light by the great psychologist Carl Jung, who had a deep interest in Gnosticism and who arranged for a copy found in a Coptic monastery to be smuggled out of Egypt. While this manuscript has become known as the *Apocryphon of James,* the work actually bears no title, but it does claim to have been written by James. In the opening lines, the author identifies himself simply as “James” without any further elaboration (as is done also in the canonical epistle of James), perpetuating the trend that is characteristic of other scriptural writings such as Acts and Galatians, where James is introduced without any background or explanation. Over and over again, we are left with the impression that James was so well known that he simply needed no introduction.

The *Apocryphon* is composed in the form of a letter addressed to a single individual whose name is no longer identifiable in the damaged manuscript. It opens with the author explaining his purpose using typical Gnostic terminology:[4]

> James, writing to . . . Peace be with you from Peace! Love from Love! Grace from Grace! Faith from Faith! Life from holy Life!
>
> Since you asked me to send you a secret book revealed to me and Peter by the Lord, I could not turn you down or refuse you. So I have written it in Hebrew, and sent it to you, and only you. But, considering that you are a minister for the salvation of the saints, try to be careful not to communicate this book to many

> people, for the Savior did not even want to communicate it to all of us, his twelve disciples. (*AJ* 1:1–3)

Though the author's opening words say the book was revealed to both James and Peter, this does not place them on equal footing. As in all of the Gnostic literature, James is clearly the leader of the apostles and the guardian of his brother's secret teachings. What is most remarkable here is James's claim to be one of the Twelve, an assertion that has caused some scholars to theorize that the James of this work is the apostle James, the son of Zebedee. The vast majority of scholars, however, hold that this is indeed James the brother of Jesus. Is it possible that Jesus' brother was one of the Twelve? Since there are two other apostles named James, it is indeed possible that one of them was either mistakenly or intentionally substituted for Jesus' brother in the gospels to cover up the fact that James was one of the Twelve (as Robert Eisenman claims).

As in the *Gospel of Thomas,* the *Apocryphon* replaces Peter with James in stories that have parallels in the canonical gospels. For example, in Matthew 16:22 Peter rebukes Jesus for speaking of his impending suffering and death, but in the *Apocryphon* it is James who says, "Lord, do not speak of your cross and death to us, for they are far from you" (*AJ* 3:12). In Mark 10:28, Peter attests on behalf of all the apostles that they have left everything behind to follow Jesus. In the *Apocryphon,* it is James who says, "[W]e have left our fathers, our mothers, and our towns, and have followed you" (*AJ* 3:1). The leadership role of James is also in evidence at the end of the *Apocryphon,* where James assigns the disciples to different mission territories and he himself goes to Jerusalem (*AJ* 10:10). As we have seen, this is likely the actual history, thus lending credibility to the *Apocryphon.*

THE *FIRST APOCALYPSE OF JAMES*

The tendencies seen in the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Apocryphon* continue in two other works found at Nag Hammadi, the *First Apocalypse of James* and the *Second Apocalypse of James.* Both of

these manuscripts actually bear the same name, *The Apocalypse of James,* but they have been distinguished by scholars by the addition of “First” and “Second.” They are again Coptic translations from the Greek and are generally dated early third century. Most scholars think that both works are based on earlier Jewish Christian writings emanating from a Jewish Christian community that survived in Syria. One piece of evidence for this is that the codices contain a series of post-resurrection dialogues between James and Jesus on the Syrian Mount Gaugela. The Jewish Christian nature of these writings is further evidenced by the fact that James repeatedly refers to his brother as “Rabbi.”

The *First Apocalypse* can be broken down into three sections: (1) a dialogue between James and Jesus prior to the crucifixion; (2) a post-resurrection dialogue; (3) the foretelling of James’s death by Jesus. Of significance in the first part is the close involvement between James and Jesus prior to the crucifixion, an intimacy that we also saw in the *Apocryphon* and that we will also see in another Jewish Christian work, the *Gospel of the Hebrews.* What is most telling here is that these works show James as a disciple of Jesus prior to the crucifixion *without placing any stress on it.* That James was a disciple prior to the crucifixion is simply unremarkable in this literature—as unremarkable as the introduction of James in Acts and Galatians.

While most of what James says in the *First Apocalypse* is related in the third person, the work opens with James speaking in the first person: “It is the Lord who spoke with me: ‘See now the completion of my redemption. I have given you a sign of these things, James, my brother. For not without reason have I called you my brother, although you are not my brother materially’” (*FAJ* 24.14–15).[5] At first glance, it may seem that Jesus is denying a blood relationship to James (“you are not my brother materially”), but this is not the case. These words actually express one of the core beliefs of the Gnostics—that the transcendent Christ did not have a material body, but only appeared to be in human form (an early heresy known as docetism). This belief comes out clearly in a post-resurrection dialogue where

Jesus says, “James, do not be concerned for me . . . 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” (*FAJ* 31:15–24). The Gnostics did not believe that Christ could suffer. Only the human form of Jesus suffered, not the transcendent Christ, who only “possessed” the body of Jesus (“I am he who was within me”).

Gnostic theology is also in evidence in a passage where Jesus tells James that he will be casting off the bonds of the flesh and returning to the place from whence he came, to again be part of the “One Who Is” (*FAJ* 24:19–24).

A tendency to highly elevate James, almost to the status of Jesus himself, appears in a passage where James’s death is likened to Jesus’ death in destroying the powers of darkness (*FAJ* 25:15–19). In this section, James is also warned to flee Jerusalem before its destruction, which may be the basis for an influential legend of the flight of the Jerusalem Christians to the city of Pella prior to the Roman invasion. In later centuries, Jewish Christian sects such as the Ebionites used the story of the flight to Pella as the basis for their claim of direct descent from the Jerusalem church. The historicity of this legend is one of the most debated issues in the study of early Jewish Christianity.

Another significant incident related in the *First Apocalypse* is an account of James rebuking the disciples, clearly demonstrating his authority over them (*FAJ* 42:20–24). James’s priority also shows itself in the passage where Jesus appears to his brother after the resurrection while James is alone in prayer on the aforementioned Mount Gaugela. James embraces and kisses Jesus and, as in other Gnostic works, receives a secret revelation (*apokalypsis* in Greek) from Jesus. James is instructed to pass this revelation on to the disciple named Addai (Syriac for Thaddeus), the Thaddeus who purportedly took a letter of Jesus to King Abgar of Edessa, which is known to have been another center of Jewish Christianity (see chapter 6). Significantly, there is no discussion of Jesus assigning any final mission to the Twelve as he does at the conclusion of

Matthew and Luke. In the *First Apocalypse*, that task is carried out by James.

THE *SECOND APOCALYPSE OF JAMES*

What we see in the *First Apocalypse* is the Gnostic and Jewish Christian belief that the mission of Jesus was handed on directly to James by Jesus. This understanding also underlies the *Second Apocalypse of James,* but in a slightly different form. Here, James divulges the secret revelation he has been given by Jesus to a Jewish Christian priest named Mareim, who commits it to writing. The church father Hippolytus apparently knew this story, for in his well-known antiheretical work *Refutation of All Heresies* (5:2) he notes that a Jewish Christian sect he calls the "Naassenes" venerated James as the one who transmitted the secret teachings of Jesus through "Mariamne." The Naasenes are almost certainly the same group we know as the Nazarenes or Nazoreans (i.e., the Jerusalem church or their descendants). In the *Second Apocalypse,* Mareim also serves as a juror at James's trial.

Whereas the *First Apocalypse* elevates James's status, the most notable feature of the *Second Apocalypse* is that James is exalted to a level far beyond that found in any other Gnostic or Jewish Christian writing. As in Hegesippus' *Memoirs* (which is likely the basis for the *Second Apocalypse*), James explains that the "door of Jesus" means the door to eternal life, or the door to heaven. In the Gnostic-flavored Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of himself as the "door" (see John 10:9). In the *Second Apocalypse,* James is portrayed as the keeper at the door to heaven, somewhat akin to the traditional role of St. Peter at the pearly gates. The *Second Apocalypse* even says that those who pass through the door to heaven belong to both Jesus and James! In one passage, James is referred to as the "illuminator and redeemer" (*SAJ* 55.17–18). In another, James is "he whom the heavens bless" (*SAJ* 55.24–25).

The *Second Apocalypse* also contains some fascinating statements about James's familial relationship to Jesus. At one point, James quotes his mother, Mary:

> [M]y mother said to me, “Do not be frightened, my son, because he [Jesus] said ‘My brother’ to you. For you were nourished with this same milk. Because of this he calls me ‘My Mother.’” (*SAJ* 50:15–22)

There could certainly be no more “natural” way of attesting that James and Jesus were natural brothers than to say they suckled at the same breast. The statement, “Because of this he *calls* me ‘My Mother,’” also has Gnostic implications, suggesting the docetic belief that Jesus only *appeared* human, and actually had no earthly mother.

The *Second Apocalypse* also trumps the *First Apocalypse* in the scene where the risen Christ appears to James. Rather than James embracing and kissing Jesus as in the *First Apocalypse,* here Jesus takes the initiative. This intimate scene is described by James in the first person:

> And he kissed my mouth. He took hold of me saying, “My beloved! Behold, I shall reveal to you those (things) that (neither) [the] heavens nor their archons have known . . . Behold I shall reveal to you everything, my beloved. (*SAJ* 50.15–22)

Jesus does indeed reveal everything to James. Even the prediction of the destruction of the Temple, which is made by Jesus in the gospels, is here predicted by James (*SAJ* 60.12–23). James even cites his impending martyrdom as the reason for the Temple’s doom. The assigning of the blame for the siege of Jerusalem to James’s death, which we also saw in Clement and Hegesippus, is here put into James’s own mouth. It is telling that the *Second Apocalypse* agrees with Josephus (over against the later Hegesippus) in laying the blame for James’s unjust execution at the feet of the Sadducees and priests, rather than the Pharisees and scribes. As we have seen, it is far more likely that James was a Pharisee than a Sadducee. The *Second Apocalypse* actually elaborates on the legal details of the trial, details that give the account a ring of authenticity (or at the very

least show that the author had a sound knowledge of Jewish and Roman courtroom procedure).

John Painter believes that what we have in the *First* and *Second Apocalypse of James* is evidence of a Gnostic Jewish Christian tradition completely independent of Josephus, Hegesippus, or Clement.[6] We will now turn an eye to this alternative Jewish Christian tradition to close out our survey of the extra-biblical literature on James.

THE JEWISH CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

The phenomenon generally referred to as "Jewish Christianity" was not a monolithic entity (in this it is like all other Christian and Jewish sects). The groundbreaking work on the nature of Jewish Christianity, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish Christian Sects* by A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, identifies five distinct Jewish Christian communities that existed in apostolic times: the Ebionites, the Elkesaites, the Nazoreans, the Cerinthians, and the Symmachians.[7] Though there is some diversity in the beliefs of these groups, James Dunn has identified three common characteristics that warrant placing each community under the umbrella label of "Jewish Christian":[8]

1. Faithful adherence to the Law of Moses.
2. The exaltation of James and the denigration of Paul.
3. A christology[*20] of "adoptionism"—they all believed that Jesus was the natural born son of Joseph and Mary and was "adopted" by God as his Son upon his baptism by John.

We shall encounter all of these traits in the documents we examine next. In addition to these three criteria, there is also a growing consensus among scholars that most of these Jewish Christian groups were influenced to a greater or lesser extent by

Gnosticism, which was well established throughout the Roman Empire by the end of the first century.

Despite the major commonalities between these groups, however, they may have been more diverse than has traditionally been supposed. One of the main criticisms that is leveled against F. C. Baur's theory of a polar opposition between a Petrine (Jewish) Christianity and a Pauline (Gentile) Christianity, is that Baur saw Jewish and Gentile Christianity too simplistically. Baur thought there was a single body of Jewish Christians led by Peter,[†21] and a single body of Gentile Christians led by Paul. In actuality, these two bodies had developed early on into a variety of subgroups.

The revered Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown first delineated the varieties of Jewish Christianity in his seminal article, "Not Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity, but Types of Jewish/Gentile Christianity."[9] Brown posits four distinguishable Jewish Christian groups. Type one is "Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who practiced full observance of the Mosaic Law, including circumcision, as necessary for . . . salvation." Type two is like type one, but its members, "did not insist on circumcision as salvific for Gentile Christians but did require them to keep some purity laws." Brown believes that both James and Peter belong in this group (recall the terms of the Apostolic Decree). Type three Jewish Christians "did not insist on circumcision as salvific for Gentile Christians and did not require their observing Jewish purity laws." Type three Jewish Christianity "did not entail a break with the cultic practices of Judaism (feasts, Temple) nor did it impel *Jewish* Christians to abandon circumcision and the Law." Brown places Paul in this group. Finally, type four can hardly retain the title *Jewish* Christian for they "saw no abiding significance in the cult of the Jerusalem Temple." This type is thus almost completely Gentile in orientation, having lost all lingering connections to parent Judaism. It is important to note that among all of the earliest Jesus communities, this is the first group that can truly be called "Christian" in the modern sense.

James Dunn, in *The Partings of the Ways,* proposes a system similar to Brown's, but breaks down early Christianity even further—into six types, again ranging from conservative Jewish believers on one end to pure Gentiles on the other. As Dunn notes of both his work and Brown's, "The value of all this has been to bring home . . . the *diversity* of first-century Christianity." But Dunn also warns against maintaining such a typology too rigidly: "A closer approximation to first-century reality is to see it as a more or less unbroken spectrum across a wide front from conservative Judaizers at one end to radical Gentiles at the other."[10]

THE *GOSPEL OF THE HEBREWS*

The most important scripture for the more staunchly *Jewish* Christian communities was the aptly name *Gospel of the Hebrews.* Unfortunately, no copies of this gospel are extant today. Rather, we know of it only from extracts in other writings, and confusion about it abounds because it seems to have gone by several different names. The church fathers reference writings known as the *Gospel of the Nazareans* and the *Gospel of the Ebionites.* These may all have been one and the same gospel, though the majority of scholars believe the *Gospel of the Hebrews* to be a distinct work, certainly dating no later than the first half of the second century, and perhaps even earlier (in other words, not much later than the gospels of Luke and John).

Serendipitously, one of the few quotations that exists from the *Gospel of the Hebrews* concerns James (there were likely many more). The passage comes down to us in Jerome's *Lives of Illustrious Men,* where Jerome (translator of the first Latin Bible) informs us that he himself translated the *Gospel of the Hebrews* from the original Hebrew. That the *Gospel of the Hebrews* was originally written in Hebrew is certainly significant, as all four of the canonical gospels were written in Greek, perhaps indicating that the *Gospel of the Hebrews* could be *earlier* than the canonical gospels. In any event, here is the passage in question:

> The Gospel called according to the Hebrews which was recently translated by me into Greek and Latin, which Origen frequently uses, records after the resurrection of the Savior:
>
> > And when the Lord had given the linen cloth [his burial cloth] to the servant of the priest, he went to James and appeared to him. For James had sworn that he would not eat bread from the hour in which he had drunk the cup of the Lord until he should see him risen from among them that sleep. And shortly thereafter the Lord said: Bring a table and bread! And immediately it is added: He took the bread, blessed it and brake it and gave it to James the Just and said to him: My brother, eat thy bread, for the Son of Man is risen from among them that sleep.[11]

Once again, the tendency to exalt James in Jewish Christianity is clearly in evidence, though it must be emphasized at this point that it is quite likely that James is not in fact being elevated over Peter as a rhetorical move on the author's part, but rather that the primacy of James is historical. Here James is the *first* recipient of a resurrection appearance. The *Gospel of the Hebrews* may in fact be the source of the rival James tradition that Paul makes use of when listing the resurrection appearances in 1 Corinthians 15.

Also of great significance is the tacit implication that James partook in the Last Supper: "he would not eat bread from the hour in which *he had drunk the cup of the Lord.*" Again, the *tacit* assumption that James was present at the last supper, without any emphasis on the matter (a matter that to us today is highly remarkable) speaks volumes for the historical authenticity of this tradition. John Painter believes the *Gospel of the Hebrews* to be important evidence for James being a disciple prior to the crucifixion:

> This fragment is important . . . because it portrays James as belonging to the circle of disciples of Jesus during his ministry and those present at the last supper. It puts in question the notion that James joined the believing community only after . . .

> the appearance of Jesus to him. Recognition of the ideological stance adopted by the canonical Gospels puts in question the reading that concludes that the brothers of Jesus did not, during his ministry, believe in him.[12]

Of course, much of the real significance depends on the dating of the *Gospel of the Hebrews.* Gerd Lüdemann points out that for F. C. Baur and the Tübingen School, the *Gospel of the Hebrews* "was supposed to be the oldest gospel and the midpoint of the Jewish-Christian gospel literature, which was precipitated out into the canonical gospels."[13] Painter is a bit more cautious than Baur; he feels that while 1 Corinthians 15 presents clear evidence of a rivalry between the supporters of James and the supporters of Peter, ". . . it is unclear where the *Gospel of the Hebrews* fits into this history."[14]

Another set of writings that F. C. Baur considered to be very early and reliable, and that he made much use of in support of his theory of a Petrine/Pauline rivalry (as does Robert Eisenman today), is a collection known as the Pseudo-Clementines.

THE *PSEUDO-CLEMENTINES*

The term *pseudo* was applied to this collection of writings because of its original (now disputed) attribution to the church father Clement—not to be confused with author of the *Outlines,* Clement of Alexandria. This Clement was the Bishop of Rome at the end of the first century and the *Pseudo-Clementines* purport to tell his story. The vast majority of scholars today consider the *Pseudo-Clementines* to be no earlier than the fourth century, at least in its final form, but a few—such as Robert Eisenman—believe that the underlying traditions contained within it are much older. This is supported by the fact that that the *Pseudo-Clementines* is an anthology of smaller works. There are two main parts: the "Homilies" and the "Recognitions." These are both made up of yet smaller works: the *Ascents of James,* the *Epistula Petri,* and the *Kerygmata Petrou.*

The *Ascents of James,* which is part of the *Recognitions,* takes its name from an incident where James ascends the steps of the Temple to engage in a public debate over Jesus being the Messiah. It is a fitting title for today—since James is indeed "ascending" from the hidden depths in which he has been too long buried. The debate into which James enters is a dispute that had been started by Peter and Clement with Jewish opponents outside the Temple. James is on the verge of persuading the crowd of Jews to be baptized, when someone mysteriously referred to only as "the enemy" enters the Temple, creates an uproar, physically accosts James, and throws him down from the top of the steps. It soon becomes quite obvious that this unnamed "enemy" is none other than Saul (Paul prior to his conversion), engaging in one of his well-known acts of violent persecution against those who proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah. Following this attack on the Temple steps, James sends Peter to spy on Saul and send back regular reports on his activities. Saul then attempts to arrest Peter, pursuing him as far as Damascus. Those scholars who believe the *Ascents* to be a late writing see this passage as a later reflection of the accounts of Paul's violent persecutions in Acts (see 8:3, and especially 9:1–2, where Paul goes to Damascus to seek out those who belong to "the Way"). It is certainly not impossible, however, that the *Ascents* records actual history. It is intriguing to speculate that it could have been while Paul was in pursuit of Peter on the road to Damascus that he had his dramatic encounter with the risen Christ, resulting in his conversion.

This intriguing story is but one of many examples of a virulent anti-Paulinism that pervades the *Pseudo-Clementines.* In light of Paul's track record, such an attitude on the part of the Jewish Christian community is certainly understandable. We know from Paul's own letters that he had indeed been a violent persecutor of the Christian community prior to his conversion. Acts tells of Saul aiding and abetting at the stoning of Stephen, even holding the cloaks of those who took part in the stoning. In light of Luke's well-known tendency in Acts to whitewash unseemly matters, and in light of Paul's well-known temper and preconversion hatred for followers

of Jesus, it is certainly not improbable that Paul did more than just hold the cloaks of the perpetrators. Acts goes on to say: “And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered . . . Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison” (Acts 8:1–3).

In view of Paul’s portrayal in Acts, it is not at all unlikely that the violent attack by Paul on James in the *Ascents of James* is factual. If the account is *not* historical, we must ask why the early Jewish Christians would invent such a story. Why would they need to, given that there were so many other well-known stories of Paul’s violence against Christians? And if Paul did indeed attack James, then it is no wonder that James and Peter were as wary of Paul as they decidedly were. Paul’s talk in Galatians of having cordial meetings with Peter and James in Jerusalem may simply have been rhetorical strategy, for Paul would certainly have had reason to downplay the fact that James and Peter were far less than receptive to his visits.

The part of the *Pseudo-Clementines* known as the *Epistula Petri* (the Epistle of Peter, sometimes called the Epistle of Peter to James) serves as an introduction to the *Kerygmata Petrou* (the Proclamation of Peter). In the epistle, Paul is again referred to obliquely, here as the “hostile man” who “teaches lawless doctrine.” It is quite obvious to all scholars that the role played in this writing by a character called Simon Magus is a veiled allusion to Paul (Simon Magus appears in Acts 8:9–24 as a sorcerer who tries to buy the power of the Holy Spirit from Peter and John). Also striking in the *Epistula Petri* is that Peter addresses this letter to “James, the lord and bishop of the holy Church” (1.1) and expresses his concern to James that, “some from among the Gentiles have rejected my lawful preaching, attaching themselves to certain lawless and trifling preaching of the man who is my enemy” (2.3).[15] In light of all the other evidence we have uncovered, this letter could indeed be historical. There is certainly nothing implausible here.

Recognitions makes the interesting argument that Paul could not have received a revelation from Jesus because his teaching does not agree with that of James and Peter, and it is further argued that Paul cannot be considered an apostle because he is not one of the Twelve (4.35). Peter is upheld as the *true* apostle to the Gentiles, who gives them the genuine (Law-based) gospel. Books 4–6 of *Recognitions* tell of a missionary journey to Tripolis undertaken by Peter, who warns his audience there to beware of false apostles (Paul?) who might come after him: "[B]elieve no teacher, unless he brings from Jerusalem the testimonial of James the Lord's brother" (4.35). Peter refers to James as "our James" and "James the bishop" (1.66). He is also called the "chief of the bishops" and "archbishop" (1.68). Clement even addresses James as "my Lord James" (3.74). Many more such references from the *Pseudo-Clementines* could be presented, but the gist is that the anthology takes the themes of Jewish Christianity that we have encountered in our survey to the extreme. The community that produced them obviously fits Raymond Brown's description of a "type one" community.

The assumption of the basic authenticity of the *Pseudo-Clementines* underlay F. C. Baur's theories, and the *Pseudo-Clementines* is still key to the theories of today's scholars such as Robert Eisenman, Hyam Maccoby, and the late Hugh Schonfield. It is certainly significant that while Jewish scholars have little problem with the reliability of the *Pseudo-Clementines,* Christian scholars generally disparage it because of its denigration of Paul and upholding of Jewish Christian theology. Much more scholarly investigation of this anthology urgently needs to be undertaken. Even though the provenance and reliability of these controversial pieces presently remains in dispute, at the very least they reveal the heart of the concerns of later Jewish Christianity and reveal something of the theological battles that Jewish Christians waged against what they considered to be apostasy and heresy (but which we today call Christianity).

JEWISH CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY

At the end of part 1, we had reached two conclusions:

1. There is nothing in the gospels that incontrovertibly shows opposition to Jesus by his family during his ministry.
2. Jesus' mother and brothers were followers of his ministry prior to the crucifixion.

By the end of part 2, we had added two more conclusions:

3. James was the leader of the Jerusalem church from its inception following Jesus' death and resurrection.
4. James's theological stance was that of Pharisaism. By implication, and as attested by independent evidence, it is likely that Pharisaism was also the theology of Jesus.

In our investigation of later history and tradition in the last two chapters, we have seen nothing that would cause us to question these conclusions, and much that further supports them. Onto these conclusions we can now add the following:

5. While the historicity of the Jewish Christian literature remains in dispute, these writings provide firm evidence that the early Jewish Christian community was firmly opposed to Paul and his theology.
6. All of the earliest followers of Jesus, up to the commencement of Paul's mission, thought of themselves as nothing other than loyal Jews.

Ultimately, all of these conclusions point to an unsettling prospect for many modern Christians. Bruce Chilton has asked a haunting question in his introduction to the compendium of research papers produced by the international Consultation on James, *James the*

Just and Christian Origins. Chilton boils all of the evidence concerning James down to

> a single, systemic concern: in its generative moment, was Christianity in fact, *as well as in its self-awareness,* a species of Judaism? That is why the relation between James and Jesus . . . is so important. If James self-consciously remained faithful to a received definition of Israel (as Paul did not), and if Jesus and James were indeed brothers of the flesh and in their affections, then the grounding conception of Christianity as a separate religion from Judaism, or even as offering a distinct revelation, is seriously compromised.[16]

In other words, if the first followers of Jesus—including the apostles and Jesus' own family—were thoroughly Jewish in their belief and practice and opposed to Paul's interpretation of the gospel, then just what is "orthodoxy" and what is "heresy"? Is Christianity, as it has come to be practiced for close to two millennia, in fact based on a heresy? And is the "heresy" of Jewish Christianity in fact the original orthodoxy?

These are disturbing questions indeed. To even consider them is heresy in the minds of many Christians today. But these questions are being addressed more and more by scholars, and if we want to learn the truth about James and Jesus, we must address them too.

4

THE NATURE OF ORTHODOXY

8

ORTHODOXY AND HERESY: JAMES AND THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

". . . believe no teacher, unless he brings from Jerusalem the testimonial of James the Lord's brother . . ."

ST. PETER PREACHING AT TRIPOLIS, *PSEUDO-CLEMENTINE RECOGNITIONS*

The historical and apocryphal works we examined in part 3 present us with two possibilities:

1. The Jewish Christian writings accurately portray Jesus' earliest followers as thoroughly Jewish in their beliefs and opposed to Paul's interpretation of Jesus' teachings.

or

2. The Jewish Christian writings are merely the attempt of a later generation of Jewish Christians to portray the apostles in a Jewish light in order to support their own Jewish understanding of Jesus.

The latter interpretation has, for obvious reasons, been the belief of the vast majority of Christian scholars. The mainstream Christian view is that the Jewish Christians painted their hero James as superior to Peter and pictured the apostles as strictly Law-observant

and opposed to Paul because they had an axe to grind with him. In actuality, the mainstream theory goes, James and the apostles agreed with Paul about abandoning the Law for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In support of this traditional understanding, we do know that a similar development occurred in the Johannine Christian community, which produced the gospel and epistles of John, a development that it would be enlightening to survey before we attempt to draw any final conclusions in our investigation.

A PARALLEL FROM JOHN

It is well known that the Gospel According to John portrays Peter negatively in relation to the anonymous "Beloved Disciple" who is portrayed as Jesus' "favorite"—the disciple who rests his head on Jesus' bosom at the Last Supper. This disciple is obviously the hero-founder of the Johannine community, for he appears only in John's gospel. Most significantly, in John it is the Beloved Disciple who is the first to believe that Jesus has risen from the dead (John 20:8). Yet, the Beloved Disciple is curiously absent in the synoptic gospels, although there have been many theories as to the Beloved Disciple being John the Son of Zebedee or another of the apostles.

John's gospel clearly demonstrates that there is a precedent for the sort of later reinterpretation of tradition (specifically in regard to the elevation of a particular apostle) that most scholars believe is at work with the elevation of James in the Jewish Christian literature. John Painter explains the correlation:

> We are reminded of the subservient role played by Peter in relation to the Beloved Disciple in the Fourth Gospel. Many scholars see in that account a struggle between the Johannine community . . . and emerging "Catholic" Christianity . . . the Beloved Disciple is also portrayed as the repository of secret tradition . . .The Johannine tradition was harnessed by the Great Church through the reconciliation of the role of Peter and the Beloved Disciple in the epilogue to the Gospel and through the acceptance of John as one of the four canonical gospels.[1]

As Painter points out, the gospel and epistles of John reveal the struggles of one particular Christian community whose beliefs and practices were in tension with other early Christian communities. Raymond Brown has written the most enlightening account of this in his magnificent work, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*.

It is also well known that the distinctly Gnostic flavor of John's gospel caused it to be scrutinized for its orthodoxy before it was allowed to join the synoptic gospels in the final canon of the New Testament. It was only in the late third and fourth century, when Christianity grew to the point where it became the official religion of the Roman Empire, that what was once a smattering of separate churches with differing, and oftentimes competing theologies and christologies, began to be pressured by political circumstances to circle around a common creed. Thus arose the impetus for the convening of the first church councils, such as Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451), where Western bishops and Eastern patriarchs, and their delegates from major cities around the Empire, hammered out which beliefs about Jesus were "orthodox," and which were to be forever after condemned as "heresy."

Long before these official councils, the theology expressed in the gospel of John had been unofficially declared orthodox by a majority of Christians simply by its popularity and increasing usage, and by the mid-second century it was accepted alongside the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as canonical. Like John, the synoptic gospels were also written by and for particular Christian communities. Of the four, Matthew's community was the most Jewish in nature. Only Matthew records these words of Jesus, which we looked at previously when we noted the Pharisaic character of Jesus' teaching:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the law . . . I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law . . . Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will

> be called least in the kingdom of heaven . . . For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:17–20)

These are some of the most debated words of Jesus in the New Testament. Both conservative and liberal scholars have tried hard to avoid their implications—liberal scholars declaring that these words were put into Jesus' mouth by the Jewish Christian Matthean community, and conservative scholars interpreting the passage as Jesus "preparing the way" for the Gospel by showing the impossibility of upholding the Law perfectly. In other words, Jesus didn't really *mean* what he said about the Law—he was simply using hyperbole to make the opposite point. These are attempts, by both liberals and conservatives, to avoid taking the implications of these words at face value—Jesus was more thoroughly Jewish than Christians throughout history have believed. If, in fact, we attribute these words to Jesus, and take them at face value, they are surely evidence of Jesus' alignment with the Pharisaic party, as a growing number of contemporary scholars are now beginning to accept.

Even more than John's gospel, the epistle of James was debated and its orthodoxy thoroughly analyzed. Well into the fourth century, James remained one of the most disputed of the popular Christian writings because of its obvious Jewish Christian theology and its apparent opposition to Paul's teaching of salvation by faith alone. This opposition doesn't get any more plain than James 2:14: "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? *Can faith save you?*" This passage gets my vote as the most explained-away verse in the New Testament. Once again, theologians of every stripe have devised clever exegetical and hermeneutical tricks[*22] to avoid taking this passage at anything but face value. But Martin Luther wasn't fooled. Luther knew *exactly* what James was saying. Given his preference, Luther would have excised the book of James from the Bible forever, along with Hebrews, Jude, and Revelation (the other thoroughly Jewish Christian books in the New Testament) and gladly tossed them all

“into the Elbe River.” In fact, when Luther translated the Bible into German, he relegated these four books to a separate section at the end of the Bible, not considering them of equal worth with the rest of the New Testament writings.

But the emerging Catholic Church had declared early on that the gospel of John was orthodox and had accepted it into the canon. So, too, the church finally accepted the epistle of James. John Painter explains that just as the emerging church needed to incorporate the views of the Johannine community for the sake of political unity, it also needed to co-opt the views of the communities centered on James—but James’s leadership role needed to be suppressed:

> There is evidence, in the tradition from Clement transmitted by Eusebius, of an attempt to harness the authority of James to the benefit of the emerging Catholic Church by rooting his authority in that of the apostles and by making him a co-recipient of the revelation with Peter and John. . . .
>
> Pauline opposition to the authority of James, the disappearance of the Jerusalem church [after the Roman invasion in 70], and the emergence of Peter as a more ecumenical transformation of the James tradition seems to have led to the suppression of James in the emerging catholic tradition. This was made easier by Luke’s attempt to obscure the conflicts within the early church in his account in Acts. His harmonization obscured the leadership of James by assimilating the roles of Peter and James, but the cracks in this treatment appear when his account is read in the light of the letters of Paul.[2]

To be fair in weighing the evidence before us, because of the example of the Beloved Disciple in the gospel of John, we see that it is not unlikely that the Jewish Christian communities, in their struggles to retain their beliefs in response to the increasing dominance of Pauline Christianity, would have exaggerated the role of James and the importance of the Law in their writings. And while

there is clearly a tendency in the later Jewish Christian literature to exalt James that sometimes borders on the unbelievable (and that might seem to dim the credibility of these writings), we must not forget that it is not only in the Jewish Christian literature that we see James elevated over Peter. *We also see this in Acts and in Galatians.* And it is also in Acts and Galatians that we see so much of the evidence for the thoroughgoing Jewishness of James and the apostles. So the leadership of James, and the strict Jewishness of the apostles, are clearly not total fabrications by the later Jewish Christian community. They may indeed be somewhat exaggerated, but they surely have a solid basis in fact.

When synthesized, the witness of the Jewish Christian literature and the evidence of the New Testament itself powerfully impel us to abandon the traditional understanding of the "heretical" nature of the Jewish Christian literature in favor of the first of the two possibilities enumerated at the beginning of this chapter: The Jewish Christian writings are indeed basically accurate in their portrayal of James's apostolic leadership and in their portrayal of James and the apostles as thoroughly Jewish in their beliefs and opposed to Paul's interpretation of Jesus' teachings.

Obviously, this is a revolutionary theory on the origins of Christianity, yet once one accepts this understanding as the inevitable outcome of an unbiased reevaluation of the evidence, the seemingly mismatched puzzle pieces in the New Testament suddenly fall into place and a bigger picture comes clearly into focus. The picture which emerges may shock many traditional Christians; for many it will be absolutely blasphemous. It is, moreover, a picture that has the potential to tear apart many cherished "truths" and to shatter a paradigm that has been in place for almost two millennia, but in its place, it is possible to see a truer and nobler picture emerging.

JESUS AND JUDAISM

The controversial (at least to Christians) Jewish scholars Hyam Maccoby, Hugh Schonfield, and Geza Vermes have seen all of this

as clearly as anyone. Schonfield in particular has long anticipated this new paradigm.[3] Maccoby demonstrates how those who hold to the traditional Christian interpretation (that Paul and the apostles were in agreement in abandoning the Law) explain away the Law-observance of the Jewish Christians by representing it as "re-Judaization," nothing more than a case of backsliding into former beliefs and practices—beliefs and practices, moreover, that Jesus had come to do away with. As Maccoby sums up the traditional understanding,

> [l]ater movements in Christianity, such as the Ebionites, are regarded as re-Judaizing sects, which lapsed back into Judaism, unable to bear the newness of Christianity. Re-judaizing tendencies are . . . [believed to exist] in certain passages in the Gospels, especially that of Matthew, where Jesus is portrayed as a Jewish rabbi: this, the argument goes, is not because he was one, but because the author of the Gospel or the section of the church to which he belonged was affected by a re-Judaizing tendency, and therefore rabbinized Jesus and tempered the extent of his rebellion against Judaism. All the evidence of the Jewishness of Jesus in the Gospels, on this view, is due to late tampering with the text, which originally portrayed Jesus as rejecting Judaism.
>
> This is a line that was fashionable at one time and is still to be found in many textbooks. Its implausibility, however, has become increasingly apparent.[4]

The anti-Semitic undertones of the mainstream Christian view have also become increasingly apparent. It is a view that has led to some of the greatest atrocities that human has inflicted upon human. It is no exaggeration to state quite bluntly that the ultimate blame for the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Holocaust can be squarely laid at the feet of this traditional understanding of Jesus and the early church.

But there is a new paradigm emerging today, one that is increasingly revealing the implausibility of the inherited paradigm. It is seen most clearly in the so-called third quest for the historical Jesus, an approach that understands Jesus as being thoroughly Jewish with no designs on starting a new religion. As was the case with Martin Luther vis-à-vis Catholicism, Jesus simply wanted to reform Judaism from within. The last thing Luther wanted to do was start a new church; the last thing Jesus wanted to do was start a new religion.

The third-quest approach to the historical Jesus is well summed up by one of the school's leading lights, the highly regarded E. P. Sanders (who sounds eerily similar to Maccoby here):

> We have again and again returned to the fact that nothing which Jesus said or did which bore on the law led his disciples after his death to disregard it. This great fact, which overrides all others, sets a definite limit to what can be said about Jesus and the law.[5]

Indeed, this is the "great fact" that we have "again and again" run up against in our investigation into James. All of the evidence we have uncovered attests to the fact that James and the apostles retained their Jewish practice and belief, while adding to it their unique belief that Jesus was the promised Messiah of Israel. It can be claimed, as many have, that the apostles quickly "backslid" into Judaism after the death of Jesus, but Hyam Maccoby clearly shows that what we know of the earliest apostolic community disproves this claim:

> The implausibility of the "re-Judaization" approach cannot be better illustrated than when it is applied to the Jerusalem movement led by James and the Apostles. This would mean that Jesus' new insights had been lost so quickly that his closest associates acted as if they had never been. Of course, it may be said that Jesus' closest associates never did understand him and, in support of this, various passages in the Gospels may be adduced; e.g., Peter's altercation with Jesus, upbraiding him for announcing the necessity of his sacrificial death . . . But here the

following question is appropriate: which is more likely, that Jesus' closest disciples failed to understand his most important message, or that Pauline Christians, writing gospels about fifty years after Jesus' death, and faced with the unpalatable fact that the "Jerusalem Church" was unaware of Pauline doctrines, had to insert into their Gospels denigratory material about the Apostles in order to counteract the influence of the "Jerusalem Church"? Mark's story about Peter, so far from proving that Peter misunderstood Jesus, is evidence of the dilemma of Pauline Christianity, which was putting forward a view of Jesus that was denied by the most authoritative people of all, the leaders of the Jerusalem movement, the companions of Jesus.[6]

A difficult question that Maccoby raises here is whether the gospel writers were as guilty of putting a Pauline spin on things as the Jewish Christian writers were of putting a "Jamesian" spin on things. As Maccoby points out, the Pauline communities faced quite a dilemma in the fact that James and Peter—who any objective observer would agree knew the teachings of Jesus better than Paul (who did not know the historical Jesus at all)—disagreed with Paul's understanding of Jesus' teachings regarding the Law. Consequently, we see Paul constantly trying to prove that his teachings are valid, especially in his arguments in Galatians, but in most of his other letters as well. In fact, it could be said that the purpose of almost all of Paul's letters was to counteract the authority, beliefs, and practices of James and the Jerusalem church. We saw how Paul lost this battle at Antioch, when Peter and Barnabas, at the urging of James, parted ways with Paul over the issue of eating with Gentiles. On this issue, the book of Acts tries hard to "Paulinize" Peter by omitting the salient fact of Peter's break with Paul at Antioch.

That Acts does attempt to put a Pauline face on Peter is best illustrated in the famous scene where Peter receives a vision that teaches him that he should abandon Jewish dietary laws:

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He

> became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heavens opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.” The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” (Acts 10:9–15)

This famous passage has traditionally been understood to mark the point where the cobwebs are swept from the brain of the dim-witted Peter, who is ever-so-slow to understand that Jesus had come to sweep away the Law. As Maccoby again astutely asks:

> [W]hy was it necessary for Peter to have a special vision to tell him something that, according to the Gospels, he had already been taught by Jesus? Why does Peter say with such unthinking conviction that he even contradicts a voice from God in saying it, “No Lord, no: I have never eaten anything profane and unclean,” *thus proclaiming his adherence to the Torah?* Peter, apparently, *has never heard of the abrogation of the Torah,* so that now, several years after the death of Jesus, he has to be slowly and painfully educated into abandoning his unquestioning loyalty to it. The answer given in the Gospels is that Peter and the other Apostles were thick-witted . . . To be quite so thick-witted, however, is incredible; and the solution, on the level of history, rather than pro-Pauline propaganda, is that *Jesus never did abrogate the Torah.* The adherence of the leaders of the so-called “Jerusalem Church” to Judaism proves that *Jesus was never a rebel against Judaism.* The Pauline Church, however, was not content to base its rejection of the Torah on Paul alone, for this would have meant the abandonment of the authority associated with the prestigious “Jerusalem Church,” and would have left a suspicious gap between Jesus and Paul. . . . A

> gradual process of enlightenment is therefore ascribed to the leaders of the "Jerusalem Church," James and Peter, by which their obtuseness is slowly dispelled, and they reach at last the realization that Jesus, during his lifetime, was telling them something that they quite failed to comprehend at the time.[7] (italics mine)

As Maccoby points out, Pauline Christianity could not relinquish the prestigious mother church in Jerusalem. All of the evidence we have uncovered in our investigation into James has brought us smack up against the "wall" of the Jerusalem church, which increasingly stood as a dividing line between Jewish and Gentile Christianity. Maccoby nicely sums up the situation that confronts us at this point:

> [E]verything points to the conclusion that the leaders and members of the so-called "Jerusalem Church" were not Christians in any sense that would be intelligible to Christians of a later date. They were Jews, who subscribed to every item of the Jewish faith. For example, so far from regarding baptism as ousting the Jewish rite of circumcision as an entry requirement into the religious communion, they continued to circumcise their male children, thus inducting them into the Jewish covenant. The first ten "bishops" of the "Jerusalem Church" . . . were all circumcised Jews. They kept the Jewish dietary laws, the Jewish Sabbaths and festivals, including the Day of Atonement (thus showing that they did not regard the death of Jesus as atoning for their sins), the Jewish purity laws (when they had to enter the Temple, which they did frequently), and they used the Jewish liturgy for their daily prayers . . .
>
> . . . the first follower of Jesus with whom Paul had friendly contact, Ananias of Damascus, is described as a "devout observer of the Law and well spoken of by all the Jews of that place." (Acts 22:12)

We have seen the evidence in Acts that the early Christian community was not only thoroughly Jewish, but on good terms with their fellow Jews and distinguished only by their belief that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel. And this was not at all unusual or heretical in the eyes of their fellow Jews. Many Jews around the time of Jesus believed that in other figures the Messiah had arrived. Many of the followers of John the Baptist believed that *he* was the Messiah. That Jesus' disciples claimed him to be the Messiah would not necessarily be seen as heretical, or even outlandish, by their fellow Jews, especially if Jesus and his family were of Davidic descent.

In fact, what is becoming increasingly accepted in historical Jesus studies, especially in the third-quest approach exemplified especially in the work of N. T. Wright, is that Jesus did indeed claim Davidic messiahship for himself.[*23] Many beyond the circle of his immediate disciples also accepted that claim. Thus, it is becoming increasingly clear that the traditional understanding, portrayed in the gospels, of large numbers of Jews turning against Jesus as a false messianic claimant, and in fact calling for his death, is a ruinous anti-Semitism that appeared only decades after Jesus' death as the Pauline/Gentile form of Christianity grew and gained power. This development is seen especially in John, the latest of the four gospels.

Maccoby also points out some fascinating things about the way Jesus is portrayed in the book of Acts that most Christians miss, probably because Maccoby is reading the Christian literature through Jewish eyes. Intriguingly enough, he claims the accounts in Acts are "evidently based on early records of the Jerusalem Nazarenes":

> [N]othing is said here about the founding of a new religion. The doctrines characteristic of Christianity as it later developed under the influence of Paul are not present. Thus Jesus is not described as a divine figure, but as "a man singled out by God" [see Acts 2:22]. His resurrection is described as a miracle from God [see Acts 2:23], not as evidence of Jesus' own divinity; and

> Jesus is not even described as the son of God. Everything said, in fact, is consistent with the attitudes of a Jewish Messianic movement, basing itself entirely on the fulfillment of the Jewish scriptures, and claiming no abrogation or alteration of the Torah.
>
> The belief that Jesus had been resurrected was . . . the mark of the movement after Jesus' death. Without this belief, the movement would simply have ceased to exist, like other Messianic movements. But this belief did not imply any abandonment of Judaism, as long as it did not involve a deification of Jesus or the abrogation of the Torah as the means of salvation.

The belief in Jesus' resurrection was indeed the hallmark innovation (as Maccoby makes painfully clear, the *only* innovation) that the followers of Jesus brought into Judaism. Maccoby then goes on to conclude:

> It is abundantly clear . . . that James and his followers in the Jerusalem movement saw no contradiction between being a member of their movement and being a fully observant Jew; on the contrary, they expected their members to be especially observant and to set an example in this respect.

Since Hyam Maccoby is a Jew, many Christians will claim his view is biased, that he fails to understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But it is interesting that the conclusions of many contemporary Christian historical Jesus scholars, especially of the third-quest school, largely agree with Maccoby. Furthermore, the conclusions of the widely respected mainstream Christian scholar James Dunn sound remarkably like Maccoby:

> [I]t is evident that *the earliest* [Christian] *community in no sense felt themselves to be a new religion, distinct from Judaism* . . . [T]hey saw themselves simply as fulfilled Judaism, the beginning of eschatological Israel . . . Indeed we may put the point more

strongly: . . . the earliest Christians were not simply Jews, but in fact continued to be quite orthodox Jews.

. . . [T]his is the group with whom Christianity proper all began. Only their belief in Jesus as Messiah and risen . . . mark them out as different from the majority of their fellow Jews. None of the other great Christian distinctives that come to expression in and through Paul are present . . .

If we now shift our glance from the beginning of Christianity forward 150 years or so into the second century and beyond, it at once becomes evident that the situation has significantly altered: Jewish Christianity, far from being the only form of Christianity, is now beginning to be classified as unorthodox and heretical.[8]

Dunn's analysis was in fact already recognized and accepted by liberal Christian scholars in Germany in the 1800s, most notably F. C. Baur. As Maccoby notes, "Nineteenth-century New Testament scholarship, on the whole, recognized these facts and gave them due weight. It has been left to twentieth-century scholarship, concerned for the devastating effect of this recognition on conventional Christian belief, to obfuscate the matter."[9]

THE LEGACY OF F. C. BAUR

It was in 1831 that F. C. Baur put forth the revolutionary hypothesis we have already examined that the supposedly united early Christian community was actually more like two clashing political parties, and that the two patron saints of the Christian church—Peter and Paul—were more akin to feuding cousins than brothers in the faith.

Baur was a remarkable man in many ways. A world-class scholar of undisputed integrity, and adept in many fields, he was legendary for his workaholism. In his office every morning by 4 A.M., by the end of his life, Baur had an average literary output equivalent to a five-hundred-page book every year for forty years!

What Baur shall be most remembered for, despite some glaring flaws in his work, is that he was the first New Testament scholar to recognize "the forest for the trees"—the first to see the larger picture

of the first-century historical reality of Christian origins. Baur's proposal—first formally put forward in the article "The Christ Party in the Corinthian Church"—was the opening volley of a revolution in our understandings of Christian origins. But we can recognize today that Baur's theories, while basically accurate, were also biased to a large extent by a deep-rooted anti-Semitism that pervades his thought. Though Baur recognized the thoroughgoing Jewishness of James and the apostles, he, too, believed it to be a consequence of "re-Judaization." Though conservative Christian scholars roundly attacked him for his "liberal" views, in hindsight Baur was still a traditional Pauline Christian who believed that Jesus came to found a new religion superior to Judaism.

One of Baur's most vocal critics in recent times was the esteemed New Testament scholar Johannes Munck. In his acclaimed work, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, Munck succinctly summarizes Baur's theory and points out the inherent weakness in it:

> Baur's view of the development of early Christianity stresses the party contrast between the primitive Church and Paul. He makes the apostles and the whole Church stand on Jewish ground throughout, apart from their belief in the crucified Jesus as the coming Messiah. Everything about Jesus that was the expression of a new religion was either forgotten or completely disregarded in the apostles' memory. When Paul rediscovers the universalism and freedom that Jesus represented, it puts him out of line with the primitive Church, which refuses to approve his message.[10]

Munck then states what he believes to be the basic problem inherent in Baur's theory:

> [I]t is quite incredible that Jesus' disciples, who were those nearest to him during the whole of his ministry, learnt and retained nothing of his life and teaching, but continued to have a

> Jewish point of view—apart, of course, from their belief that the crucified Jesus was identical with the coming Messiah.

This quote could just as well have come from Maccoby's own hand. When bedfellows as odd as Munck and Maccoby agree on a point as salient as this one, we know we're on to something. Munck simply could not bring himself to believe that the disciples would have retained their traditional Jewish beliefs after being "enlightened" by Jesus, and this is why he rejected Baur's thesis. For his part, Baur was ahead of his time in insisting on the Jewishness of the Jerusalem church and the disharmony of the early church as a whole. What sets him apart from most of today's third-quest scholars is that he assigned the disciples' adherence to the Law to backsliding. But this is where Baur made his only real mistake. As all the evidence we have examined has shown us, the apostles' ongoing adherence to Jewish faith and practice was most emphatically *not* a case of "re-Judaization." As Maccoby starkly makes clear, the disciples had simply *never abandoned* their Jewish beliefs and practices. And the reason—a reason that slaps us modern-day Christians right across the face—is that *Jesus* had not abandoned those beliefs and practices.

Another component of Baur's theory that has remained influential is the idea that it was in the give-and-take (what scholars technically call "dialectic," following the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel) of the friction and struggles between the Jewish Christian and Gentile Christian churches that a new religion—Christianity as we know it today—emerged. Evangelical commentator Timothy George provides one of the best summaries I have come across of Baur's thinking on the dialectical origins of Christianity:

> Baur proposed that the history of early Christianity could be read in terms of the polar opposition between two rival factions. One, led by Paul and Apollos, emphasized the Christian mission to the Gentiles; the other, gathered around Peter and James, stressed the priority of the Jerusalem church and the continuing validity of the Jewish law for Christian believers . . . According to this view,

> the Pauline party continued to become more and more radical in its break with Judaism until it was ultimately absorbed into Gnosticism. The Petrine party, on the other hand, became more and more narrow, gradually evolving into such Jewish-Christian sectarian groups as the Ebionites. Eventually a synthesis between the Pauline and Petrine extremes was achieved in the emergence of "early Catholicism."[11]

Hegel's influence on Baur is obvious. Hegel understood all of history to proceed "dialectically": in the struggle between a "thesis" and an "antithesis," a new "synthesis" occurred. In the case of the early church, it was in the struggle between Jerusalem-based Jewish Christianity and Pauline-based Gentile Christianity that the synthesis of Catholic Christianity emerged. It is possible to see this theory played out in the pages of the New Testament. The Jewish Christian "thesis" is represented in the books of Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation; the Pauline corpus represents the "antithesis"; and the conciliatory Acts represents the earliest synthesis of the two poles.

Baur used as primary evidence of this struggle the arguments Paul makes against his opponents in Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Philippians—opponents who would clearly seem to be strict Jewish Christians who want to "Judaize" Paul's Gentile converts. In Philippians, Paul writes bitterly of them: "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Jesus Christ and have no confidence in the flesh" (3:1–2). This is one of Paul's classic pieces of vitriol against those who claim that circumcision is necessary for salvation. In Galatians, Paul is furious with the believers in Galatia for being deceived by these "Judaizers": "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? . . . Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?" (3:1–3). In 2 Corinthians, Paul similarly rails against the Corinthian Christians for their gullibility:

> I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray . . . For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed . . . or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. (11:3–5)

Just who these "super apostles" are who have been "deceiving" the believers in Corinth is another of the greatly debated questions in New Testament scholarship. Paul goes on to mysteriously describe them as "false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:13–15). It is these words that caused Baur to come to the conclusion that these "super apostles" were none other than the original apostles. One can see why Baur would think so. Ever since Baur first put forth his disturbing theory, all kinds of exegetical and hermeneutical gymnastics have been performed to conclude otherwise, but Baur's main thesis remains sound.

In the 1800s, Baur's theories were vociferously attacked as heresy. It is no exaggeration to say that he was one of the first victims of the modern academic inquisition. The two leading disciples of the "old master of Tübingen," Eduard Zeller and Albert Schwegler (both brilliant scholars in their own right), were driven out of teaching because of their views. Unfortunately, truth often comes at a perilous price. As Jesus taught, prophets are without honor in their own time.

Baur can also be justifiably criticized for portraying too simplistically a bipolar rivalry between Jewish and Gentile Christianity, an issue that scholars today realize was much more complex than a simple two-party battle. As we have seen, there were many competing factions within the early church, falling along a continuum from conservative "Judaizers" to liberal Hellenistic Christians. James Dunn has summarized how some early attempts were made in the late nineteenth century to amend Baur's theory:

> Early on [Baur's theory] was qualified by the recognition that his portrayal of early Christianity in terms of a confrontation between two monolithic blocks was too much of an oversimplification. The Jewish Christians could not be lumped together as a single group opposed to Paul. "Strict or extreme Judaizers" were to be distinguished from "moderate Jewish Christians," and while the former could be linked to Jerusalem, Peter was to be distinguished from them, with the question whether James should be reckoned a Judaizer a subject for some debate.[12]

This, then, became a generally accepted alternative to Baur's theory. Dunn goes on to explain that over a century later scholars were still attempting to avoid the implications of the original Tübingen theory by positing other possibilities for the identity of Paul's opponents:

> Baur's basic claim, that the opposition to Paul during his mission should be designated as "Judaizers," Jewish Christians who insisted that Paul's Gentile converts must be circumcised and become Jews, was widely accepted, and indeed became axiomatic in most of the discussions of the next hundred years . . .
>
> This broad consensus has received two major challenges in the twentieth century . . . W. Lütgert saw Paul's chief opponents at Corinth as spiritual enthusiasts, an early type of gnostic libertines . . . and saw them also alongside the [Judaizers] as a second front in Galatians. And W. Schmithals pushed the case further by arguing that in Galatians there are no judaizers in view at all, only Jewish Gnostic Christians, with similar claims for Corinthians and Philippians . . .
>
> J. Munck developed the reaction against Baur and the Tübingen school on another front by arguing that there was no judaizing party in Jerusalem and by rejecting the "pan-Judaizer" hypothesis . . . Paul's letters were addressed to different situations with different opponents. . . . The judaizing opponents

> in Galatians are *Gentile* Christians keen to adopt the practices of the Law . . . the compulsion to "Judaize" did not come from Jewish Christianity, which was concerned only for its mission within Israel, but was a *Gentile* Christian "heresy." (italics mine)

Gentile Christians *keen* to adopt the practices of the Law? Gentile *men* keen to be circumcised? The illogic of all this is rather obvious. While one could assert that the fervor with which many people even today embrace the religions they convert to could show that Gentiles might have been willing and even eager to fulfill all the requirements of the Law, including circumcision, there is evidence to reject this hypothesis. As we have noted, there were many "God-fearers," Gentiles who adopted the Jewish faith, but they were only expected to adhere to the minimal Noahide laws (the regulations stipulated in the Apostolic Decree). In fact, it was the unworkability of requiring adherence to the Law for Gentiles that fueled Paul's mission. Although Munck's theories gained much attention from scholars eager to dismiss the Tübingen theory, in hindsight it is quite obvious that Munck's is a last-gasp effort to avoid the increasingly obvious—but for many, unpalatable—facts that Baur first saw almost two centuries ago.

Many others have attempted in the past 175 years to offer viable alternatives to Baur's description of an early church fraught with discord, but the alternatives all falter on the balance beam of common sense. Simply put, we know that Paul faced opposition. That opposition was, in fact, the impetus for the writing of almost all of his letters. Now, if we look at the situation objectively—just based on a commonsense approach to these basic facts—who else could these opponents possibly have been other than *Jewish* Christians, and not just any Jewish Christians, but the apostolic leadership itself? At the time that Paul wrote, *less than twenty years* after the crucifixion, there simply would not have been enough time for "heresies," such as the Gnosticism that Munck and others proposed, to have permeated the widespread Christian communities. Munck's hypothesis, that Paul's opponents were *Gentile* Christians who were enthusiastic for the Law, strains credibility.

Even if, for arguments's sake, there *were* such a thing as Gnostic or Gentile "Judaizers" early on, such novel groups would certainly not have been able to exert any great influence on the communities established by Paul and his missionary companions. And certainly such fledgling heretical groups would not yet have the logistical capability or the necessary authority (which can only come with time or with one's close relationship to the founders) to be sending missionaries to far-flung parts of the empire to convert established Gentile churches to Jewish practice (especially if, as the theory goes, they themselves were not Jewish). And, last but certainly not least, Paul would surely not refer to them as *apostles*, as he does in 2 Corinthians.

Simply put, Who else but the apostles themselves would have had the motive, the ability, and, most importantly, the *authority* (already in the years circa 45–50) to send emissaries to so many far-flung Gentile communities—including Antioch, Corinth, Philippi, and Galatia—to preach adherence to the Law? That it could have been anyone other than the apostles defies all logic. No one other than Jesus' own apostles would posses the authority to influence these new Christians on such an important matter, especially when it was a matter in such serious disagreement with the highest authority in the Gentile churches—Paul himself. No one other than the apostles would dare to take on Paul. And not only challenge Paul, but win!

F. C. Baur was indeed on the right track. He saw the "matching shorelines," but couldn't quite make all the pieces fit since he lacked the proper supporting mechanism, just as Alfred Wegener in his theory of continental drift lacked the supporting evidence of seafloor spreading, which wasn't discovered until later. The most damaging criticism of Baur, in fact, is not that he oversimplified the division in the early church or that he erroneously believed that the Jewish Christians were "backsliders," but rather that his theory as a whole is anti-Semitic insofar as it understands Christianity to be the superior replacement for an inferior Judaism. What has often been little understood is the extent to which he perpetuated an ancient tradition of Christian supersessionism (i.e., that Christianity supersedes

Judaism). How this latent anti-Semitism detracts from Baur's theory is revealed quite well in an article in the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters,* which highlights the all-toocommon belief (perpetuated by Baur) that Christianity is a universal religion that God intended to be a superior replacement for the outmoded particularistic religion of Judaism:

> Paul is seen too much as an isolated apostle who alone truly understands the universalism and freedom that Jesus represented. Apparently in the memory of the other leading apostles this has either been forgotten, misunderstood or compromised. A misleading contrast informed Baur's and many of his followers' theology—they posited an absolute opposition between particularism [Judaism] and universalism [Christianity]; . . . from this perspective Paul was seen as a lone contender for the universalism of the gospel in contrast to the primitive church, whose leaders were in varying degrees tribalistic or particularistic in their ongoing commitment to Judaism.[13]

Both in spite of and because of this serious shortcoming of the Tübingen theory, a revival of Baur's theories is occurring under the influence of the third-quest school of thought, especially in the writings of extremely liberal Christian scholars, such as Micheal Goulder and Gerd Lüdemann, and controversial Jewish scholars, such as Robert Eisenman and Hyam Maccoby. Even mainstream Christian scholars, such as James Dunn and Bruce Chilton, and conservative scholars, such as Craig A. Evans, are opening the door to a new acceptance of Baur's theories, but in a revised form that more accurately reflects the complexity and diversity of early Christianity. Dunn, however, warns against falling into the trap that caught Baur: There was no polar opposition between two monolithic camps. In line with his emphasis on the wide but continuous spectrum of belief in the early church, Dunn says, "I go along with the older F. C. Baur thesis at least to the extent that emerging catholicism was a catholic synthesis of several strands and tendencies (and factions) within earliest Christianity."[14]

This leaves us still facing the vital question, Amid all of the variety of early Christian belief, what was the original “orthodoxy”? What was the nature of the originating source from which all of these “strands and tendencies” first divided, and then late re-coalesced to produce a “catholic synthesis”?

THE FIRST ORTHODOXY

James Dunn, like Maccoby, believes that when one tries to get to the root of the earliest, most primitive strand of belief from which the diversity of early Christianity sprang, one is led right back to Jewish Christianity. This might seem rather obvious since Jesus, his family, and his apostles were all Jews. But while this is usually obvious to someone coming at it from outside the Christian tradition, for those inside the Christian tradition the obvious has not always been easy to recognize. In this case, the overgrown and tangled branches of accumulated Christian tradition obscure the forest. Just as often, traditional Christian scholars have harbored a subconscious desire not to *want* to know the truth, which, of course, makes it all the more difficult to see the real picture.

James Dunn is one leading scholar who has made the effort to rise above the treeline. In his examination of the three distinguishing features of later Jewish Christian communities such as the Ebionites (faithful adherence to the Law of Moses, reverence for James, and an adoptionist christology), Dunn sees something the majority of Christian scholars would prefer to ignore:

> If these are indeed the three principal features of heretical Jewish Christianity, then a striking point immediately emerges: *heretical Jewish Christianity would appear to be not so very different from the faith of the first Jewish believers.*[15]

The three main tenets of Jewish Christian belief and practice that Dunn enumerates are what led to the Jewish Christians being labeled as heretics by the emerging Catholic Church. The Jewish Christians, on the other hand, thoroughly rooted in the teachings of James and the apostles, thought of the Pauline churches as the

heretics. And this brings us to the trickiest question in the study of Christian origins: What is orthodoxy, and what is heresy? Dunn notes that by the second century

> there was no uniform concept of orthodoxy at all—only different forms of Christianity competing for the loyalty of believers. In many places, particularly Egypt and eastern Syria [centers of Jewish Christianity], it is . . . likely that what later churchmen called [Jewish] Christianity was the initial form of Christianity . . . The concept of orthodoxy only began to emerge in the struggle between different viewpoints—the party that won claimed the title "orthodox" for itself![16]

Or, to put it in other words, orthodoxy is merely the most successful heresy.

These observations on the nature of orthodoxy and heresy become clearer when one understands that the word "heresy" comes from the Greek *haeresis,* which carries the root meaning of an "opinion" or a "party line." Therefore, in the strict sense of the word, all of the early Christian communities had their own heresy—their own opinion about who Jesus was. It was only many years later—at the Council of Nicaea in 325—that by majority vote it was permanently decided what would forever be the acceptable heresy, which then, by definition, became orthodoxy. Walter Bauer (no relation to F. C. Baur), most well known today for his monumental Greek-English Lexicon, wrote the seminal volume on this idea, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity,* in 1934, a groundbreaking work that has had an ever-increasing influence on New Testament scholarship. Bauer powerfully demonstrated that it is difficult to maintain that there ever was any pristine unified doctrine in the early church, only many competing heresies. British scholar, Michael Goulder, who is one of today's strongest supporters of the Tübingen theory, provides a succinct analysis of the situation revealed to us in the light of the ideas of Baur and Bauer:

> When in church life there is an irreconcilable difference over important doctrine, there are winners and losers. The winning party becomes the church, and its opinion is orthodoxy . . . the losing party is driven out of the church and becomes a sect . . . or heresy . . . In the early Christian church the Petrines won at Antioch (Gal. 2.11–14); but Paul played his cards carefully, and did not split away. In the second century the Paulines won and the Aramaic [Jewish Christian] churches split away . . . and became heretical sects called the Ebionites and the Nazarenes.[17]

As we have noted before, the Ebionites claimed that they were in fact the direct descendants of the Jerusalem church. Wishing to keep its blinders on, most Christian scholarship has dismissed this claim, but there is the fascinating legend recorded in Eusebius and Epiphanius of the escape of the Jerusalem Christians prior to the Roman invasion thanks to the warning of a prophecy, whence they fled to Pella in Transjordan. If this legend has any basis in fact (and most legends have at least some basis in fact), it would be from Pella that the later Jewish Christian communities such as the Nazoreans, the Ebionites, and the Elkesaites developed. The flight to Pella could explain how the Jewish Christian “heresy” spread beyond Palestine.

One of the first heresy hunters of the emerging Catholic Church was the church father Irenaeus, who wrote the mammoth five-volume *Against Heresies.* Irenaeus sums up the distinctive beliefs and practices of the heretical Ebionites thus:

> They use the gospel according to Matthew only, and repudiate the apostle Paul, maintaining that he was an apostate from the Law . . . [T]hey practice circumcision, persevere in those customs which are enjoined by the Law, and are so Judaic in their style of life that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God. (AH 1.26.2)

We can see from Irenaeus's description that the Ebionites plainly fit the criteria of "Jewish Christian." It is quite likely that all of the later Jewish Christian groups ultimately derived from a Nazirite movement in Jerusalem in which, as we saw in Acts 21, James was closely involved.

Mainstream Anglican scholar Bruce Chilton, one of the organizers of the international Consultation on James, has come to the conclusions that James was indeed a Nazirite, that he most likely had at least some connection with this strict sect, and that this is the most likely reason that Jesus was called Jesus "of Nazareth":

> [M]y suggestion that James was a Nazirite, and saw his brother's movement as focused on producing more Nazirites, enables us to address an old and as yet unresolved problem of research. Jesus, bearing a common name, is sometimes referred to as "of Nazareth" in the Gospels . . . There is no doubt but that a geographical reference is involved (see John 1:45–46). But more is going on here. Jesus is rarely called "of Nazareth" or "from Nazareth" . . . He is usually called "Nazoraean" or "Nazarene." Why the adjective, and why the uncertainty in spelling? The Septuagint [the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible] shows us that there were many different transliterations of "Nazirite": that reflects uncertainty as to how to convey the term in Greek . . . Some of the variants are in fact very close to what we find used to describe Jesus in the Gospels. . . .
>
> For James and those who were associated with him, Jesus' true identity was his status as a Nazirite.[18]

Conservative scholar, Craig Evans, coeditor with Chilton of the compendium of research papers *James the Just and Christian Origins*, follows the trail of evidence to another startling conclusion. He notes some astonishing commonalities between James and Jesus regarding the reason for their deaths:

> According to the four New Testament Gospels, Jesus engaged in controversy with the ruling priests, a controversy which included

a demonstration in the Temple precincts, and was subsequently handed over to the Roman governor, who executed him as the "king of the Jews.". . .

Although different at points, the fate that overtook James, the brother of Jesus, is similar . . .

Jesus had been accused of blasphemy, while James later was accused of being a lawbreaker. Both were condemned by High Priests—High Priests who were related by marriage. Jesus was handed over to the Roman governor, who complied with the wishes of the ruling priests, while James was executed without the approval of Roman authority . . . In the case of Jesus, Pilate saw warrant in execution, for a serious political charge could be made (i.e., "king of the Jews"). In the case of James, however, evidently no such compelling case could be made.[19]

Of this interesting set of parallels, Evans reaches a conclusion quite similar to that of John Dominic Crossan:

That both brothers, Jesus and James, should be done away by Caiaphas and his brother-in-law Ananus is surely more than mere coincidence. A Davidic element . . . complete with devotion to the Temple . . . and probable criticism of Temple polity . . . seems to be the thread that runs throughout.

The line of continuity between Jesus and brother James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, supports the contention that Jesus and James may very well have advanced the same agenda over against the Temple establishment, and both suffered the same fate at the hands of essentially the same people . . . The subsequent, partially parallel career of James moves us to view the activities of his brother Jesus in terms of the Jewish Temple and teachings that his contemporaries understood as holding serious implications for this sacred institution. For this reason we must eschew recent faddish scholarship that minimizes the role of the Temple in the life and ministry of Jesus.

In the scholarship of Evans and Crossan, we find another instance of scholars from the conservative and liberal camps reaching the same conclusion on the thorough Jewishness of James and Jesus. One of the very few common conclusions reached by the many scholars engaged in the current quest for the historical Jesus is that Jesus' arrest and crucifixion were a direct result of his terroristic protest in the Temple, which is, significantly, one of the few stories relayed in all four Gospels (Matt. 21:12–17; Mark 11:15–18; Luke 19:45–48; John 2:13–22).

According to the synoptic gospels, Jesus was arrested not long after his attempt to cleanse the Temple. And if Jesus was indeed of the line of David, this attempt to purify the Temple would have been his royal prerogative. This was the temple envisioned by David and built by his son, Solomon. And the Temple was the house of God (in Jesus' words, "my Father's house," as stated in Luke 2:49 and John 2:16). Jesus and James apparently shared the same agenda of reforming (or perhaps even doing away with) the corrupt leadership of the aristocratic ruling Sadducees.

And let us not forget that Jesus was executed on the Roman charge of treason—for claiming to be the "king of the Jews." While most modern scholars have eschewed the idea that Jesus was actually of Davidic descent (the generally accepted idea being that this was a later claim of the early church), the Davidic ancestry of Jesus is one of the core claims of the New Testament. It is rather ironic that Jewish scholars have taken the Davidic claim more seriously than Christian scholars. Again, Hyam Maccoby notes what many Christian scholars have failed to see:

> [T]he Gospels say quite distinctly that Jesus founded a Church. Why, then, did the Apostles of Jerusalem act as if no Church had been founded, and they were still members of the Jewish religious community? This leads to the further puzzling question: if Jesus, as the Gospels say, chose Peter as the leader of the Church, why were the Nazarenes, after Jesus' death, led not by Peter, but by James . . . a person who is not even mentioned in

> the Gospels as a follower of Jesus in his lifetime? This is the kind of contradiction that, if logically, considered, can lead us to the true picture of the history of Jesus' movement in Jerusalem, as opposed to the picture which the later Church wished to propagate.[20]

The two questions that Maccoby puts forth are the main questions we have had to face in our investigation into the mystery of James. The answers are obvious when we fully understand the reasons for which Jesus and James were put to death. Maccoby's explanation is well worth quoting at length as a summary of where we have arrived in our own investigation:

> To understand . . . we must remind ourselves of what Jesus really was. He was not the founder of a Church, but a claimant to a throne. When Peter . . . hailed Jesus as "Messiah," he was using the word in its Jewish sense, not in the sense it acquired in the later Christian church. In other words, Peter was hailing Jesus as King of Israel. Jesus' response was to give Peter his title of "Rock" and to tell him that he would have "the keys of the kingdom of Heaven." The meaning of this phrase, in its Jewish context, is quite different from what later Christian mythology made of it, when it pictured Saint Peter standing at the gates of Heaven, holding the keys, and deciding which souls might enter . . . the reference is not to some paradise in the great beyond, but to the Messianic kingdom on Earth, of which Jesus had just allowed himself to be proclaimed King—i.e., the Jewish kingdom, of which the Davidic monarch was constitutional ruler, while God was the only real King.
>
> By giving Peter the "keys of the kingdom," Jesus was appointing him to be his chief minister . . .
>
> . . . This explains fully the relationship between Peter and James . . . in the movement, and why James suddenly rises to prominence at this point. When Jesus became King, his family became the royal family, at least for those who believed in Jesus'

> claim to the Messiahship. Thus, after his death, his brother James, as his nearest relative, became his successor; not in the sense that he became King James, for Jesus was believed to be alive, having been resurrected by a miracle of God, and to be waiting in the wings for the correct moment to return to the stage as the Messianic King. James was thus a Prince Regent, occupying the throne temporarily in the absence of Jesus.
>
> Further proof that this was the situation can be derived from what is known about other members of Jesus' family. After James . . . was executed . . . he was succeeded by another member of Jesus' family, Simeon, son of Cleophas, who was Jesus' cousin. This again shows that the structure of the "Jerusalem Church" was monarchical, rather than ecclesiastical. Moreover, there is evidence that the Romans saw the matter in this light, for they issued decrees against all the descendants of the house of David, ordering them to be arrested; and Simeon . . . was eventually executed by the Romans as a pretender to the throne of David.

Maccoby's assessment neatly ties together all of the evidence we have evaluated in our investigation of James. Another controversial Jewish scholar, Robert Eisenman, summarizes the conclusion our investigation has brought us to quite succinctly: "Once James has been rescued from the oblivion into which he has been cast . . . [it] will . . . no longer be possible to avoid, through endless scholarly debate and other evasion syndromes, the obvious solution to the problem of the Historical Jesus . . . the answer to which is simple. Who and whatever James was, so was Jesus."[21]

The answer is indeed quite obvious, once one sees the larger picture that comes into view when all of the puzzle pieces are put together. But the emergent picture is not easy for many Christians to take in all at once. Now that we have completed the puzzle, we find ourselves facing a revolutionary (not to say heretical) paradigm—that not only were James and the apostles thoroughly Jewish in their beliefs and practice, but so was Jesus: the original orthodoxy was in

fact a strict form of messianic Judaism. And we have been led to this conclusion, inexorably and step by step, by none other than the brother of the Messiah himself, James the Just—the unsung hero of Christianity.

9

THE FORGOTTEN HERO: JAMES AND THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law . . . I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."

JESUS, MATTHEW 5:17

In light of the previous chapters, it should be quite clear why James lies at the storm-center in the struggles of the early church to decide what was orthodoxy and what was heresy. It is certainly no coincidence that he is connected with so many defining events in the development of the early church, both within his lifetime and for centuries afterward. James's undisputed leadership of the Jerusalem church for thirty years after Jesus' death, his unquestioned wisdom and vision at the Jerusalem Council, and his exalted status in the memory of the later Jewish Christian communities, all attest to the paramount role that James played in the struggles of the early church to define its theology vis-à-vis parent Judaism.

SPLITTING UP THE FAMILY

Two of the most important Christian articles of faith that developed in conjunction with the emergence of the embryonic Catholic Church were the doctrine of the virgin birth and its codicil, the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. As these Marian beliefs became ever more central to Christian theology, early church Fathers such as Origen, Epiphanius, Eusebius, and Jerome began to seek alternative

explanations for the relationship of Jesus to those whom the early Christian writings call his “brothers” and “sisters.” This brings us to a fascinating apocryphal writing, generally dated early third century, known as the *Protevangelium of James* which I have intentionally reserved for now. Although quite popular in its time, the *Protevangelium* (Protogospel) was rejected by Jerome as heresy, and its use in the Western (but not the Eastern) Churches of the Roman Empire soon died out. The *Protevangelium* is a nativity story akin to the nativity stories in Matthew and Luke, but with some surprising differences. In the *Protevangelium,* the birth of Jesus takes a backseat to the details of Mary’s virginity. Here, a midwife who aids in Jesus’ delivery discovers upon inspection that Mary’s virginity is miraculously intact after the delivery of Jesus. We can starkly see the earliest traces of a belief in the perpetual virginity of the Mother of Jesus.

The *Protevangelium* also portrays Joseph as a widower with children from a previous marriage, thus explaining away Jesus’ siblings. In a rather sublime passage in the *Protevangelium,* a youthful James leads the ass on which the pregnant Mary rides as the family makes their way to Bethlehem (17.2). This became a beloved story in the Eastern Orthodox Church, where the theme worked its way into art. A famous fourteenth-century painting by Giotto, the *Flight into Egypt,* depicts a variation of the story, with James leading the ass on which Mary is tenderly carrying the infant Jesus as the family flees King Herod’s massacre of the infants. A more poignant statement of the essence of the Epiphanian theory—that Jesus’ siblings were actually step-siblings—would be hard to find.

Jerome, however, rejected the *Protevangelium* because it did not go far enough in dissociating Joseph’s children from Jesus. Jerome, who was the person mainly responsible for priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church, also advocated virginity for Joseph. Jerome proposed that the “brothers” and “sisters” mentioned in the New Testament were actually Jesus’ *cousins*, based on an eisegesis (“reading into” a passage, essentially a wishful interpretation) of two

statements in Mark and John. In John, one of the women standing alongside Jesus' mother at the cross is her sister, who seems, curiously, to also be named Mary: "Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" (19:25). Depending on how one interprets the syntax of this sentence, there could be three or four women here. "Mary the wife of Clopas" could refer back to "his mother's sister," making it a total of three women; or Mary's sister could be unnamed, making it four women at the cross. Jerome concludes that Mary the wife of Clopas is "his mother's sister," thus making her Jesus' aunt. Jerome further concludes that this is the same Mary mentioned in Mark: "There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome" (15:40). Proceeding under two unfounded assumptions (that "Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses" is the same Mary mentioned in John and that she is Jesus' aunt), Jerome then makes the further jump that "James the younger and Joses" must be the same James and Joses named in Matthew 6:3 as being two of Jesus' "brothers," thus actually making them Jesus' *cousins!* By this exegetical sleight of hand, Jerome rescues both Mary *and* Joseph from the stain of sexual intercourse.

Due to Jerome's powerful influence, this understanding came to be Roman Catholic dogma. Since James was now no longer the brother of Jesus, any lingering interest in the erstwhile bishop of the church quickly waned. Thus it was that James the Just, the eldest brother of Jesus, and *the* leading figure in earliest Christianity, became a forgotten man.

THE FALLOUT OF WAR

One other significant event conspired to sweep James into the dustbins of history. The siege of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E. resulted in the dissolution of the Jerusalem church and the scattering of those who upheld Jewish Christian beliefs into the Diaspora. Living in the Gentile world, where their position was far

less influential, any esteem that the Jewish Christians had enjoyed quickly diminished, especially as the Gentile churches flourished (with Paul's letters forming the basis for their theology). The final nail in the coffin for Jewish Christianity came when the Jewish Christian views about Jesus began to be declared officially heretical by the growing power of the dominant church in Rome.

With the loss of the Temple and the central authority of Jerusalem, infant Christianity was soon weaned of its Jewish sustenance and nurtured almost exclusively on Pauline teachings and Gentile understandings. Then, in its later adolescence, Gentile Catholic Christianity severed any lingering ties with mother Judaism and based its theology completely on Paul's teaching of faith in Christ as the replacement for the Law. At the same time, Jesus' crucifixion came to be interpreted as the atoning sacrifice by which God's new covenant with humanity was consummated and sealed with blood. Bereft of its Jewish roots, the church came to understand the new covenant through Jesus as a complete replacement for the "old" covenant that God had made with the Jews. And once the child rebelled against the parent to the extent that it declared the old covenant no longer effectual even for Jews, the ugly roots of anti-Semitism began to take hold.

This brings us now to the bottom-line question: What would Jesus have thought of the development of the early church? Would Jesus have agreed with how Paul interpreted his ministry and his message? In short, is the Christian church that emerged as the official religion of the Roman Empire what Jesus would have wanted? Paul's teachings are being seen by a rapidly growing number of modern scholars and writers as a distortion of what Jesus taught, and the development of the Christian church as a travesty of the original Jewish beliefs and teachings of Jesus. Yet, in the end, the Christian Church that developed was actually the salvation of Jesus' teaching, for without the rise to power of the Church of Rome, the Christian movement would surely have died out, and Jesus' message would have faded into obscurity. Though many contemporary scholars have claimed (with some justification) that

Paul essentially "invented" Christianity, without the theological innovations that Paul brought into it, the Jesus movement would surely have died. While the Christian church that emerged indeed has many flaws, and has committed many grievous sins, it has managed (to some extent despite itself) to preserve the essential story and teaching of Jesus for the ages.

PARTICULARISM AND UNIVERSALISM

Pauline Christianity survived because it was the most successful of all the early heresies (or parties) of the Christian movement. And it was the most successful heresy for a simple and quite legitimate reason—it had the most universal appeal. James and the Jewish Christians saw their mission as being almost exclusively to the *Jews*. And it must be emphasized yet again that James's mission was the continuation of Jesus' mission. John Painter comments:

> The evidence of the Gospels suggests that James, in limiting his active role in mission to the Jews, was consistent with the practice of Jesus for whom, according to the Gospels (which reflect the reality of the mission to the nations), mission beyond the people of Israel was exceptional.
>
> James, centered in Jerusalem with a focus on the mission to the Jews, had every right to think that his approach to mission was true to the mission of Jesus and that the mission of Paul was without adequate precedent in the practice of Jesus . . . Nevertheless . . . evidence suggests that Jesus was not strictly observant of Jewish purity laws, and it can be argued that the Law-free mission to the nations is an extension of the logic arising from the exceptional practice of Jesus.[1]

With only a very few exceptions (at least as far as we know from the gospels), Jesus' mission was aimed exclusively at the people of Israel and James's mission clearly reflects this, but as Painter notes, Paul's Gentile mission had its roots in the practice of Jesus as well: "The Pauline position was an extension of the exceptional practice of

Jesus, which did not wait until Israel first enjoyed the blessings and was satisfied before extending the blessing to the nations."

The prime example of Jesus' "exceptional practice" is the well-known story of the Gentile woman who begs Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter (Matthew 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30). Here is Matthew's version:

> Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Quite surprisingly, Jesus is hesitant to help this needy woman, even likening her to a dog (a Jewish term of derision for Gentiles) begging for scraps at the table prepared for God's children, the Jews. Many defensive explanations have been offered for Jesus' most un-Jesus-like behavior here (I must confess to having used these myself in sermons to try to "explain away" the import of this passage), but Jesus' hesitancy to reach beyond Israel is quite clear from his blunt response to the woman: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." Of course, he does in fact end up helping her, after she dares to rebut him.

The traditional Christian explanation for Jesus' behavior in this passage is that Jesus' mission *during his lifetime* could only be focused on the Jews, but later, through his post-resurrection commissioning of Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles, Jesus also brought the Gospel to the nations. As we have seen, traditional

Jewish belief was that the salvation of the Gentiles would come *through Israel,* an idea rooted in scriptures such as Isaiah's prophecy of the Gentile nations carrying their treasures into the Temple in Jerusalem on the Day of the Lord. The prophets likened the Temple on Mt. Zion to a beacon on a hill, bringing light and salvation to all nations.

In light of this image of the beacon, it is fascinating to look again at James's adjudication of the Jerusalem Council, called to decide the question of the salvation of the Gentiles (most emphatically, those in attendance, including Paul, were not concerned about the salvation of the Jews). In his concluding remarks at the Council, James quoted the prophet Amos:

> *After this I will return,*
> *And I will rebuild the dwelling of David,*
> *which has fallen;*
> *from its ruins I will rebuild it,*
> *and I will set it up,*
> *so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—*
> *even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called.*

For as much distance as is often put between James and Paul, James did support Paul's mission to the Gentiles; and, conversely, Paul continued to uphold the centrality of the Jerusalem church. Paul believed that through his mission, and especially through his collection for the Jerusalem church, he was fulfilling the prophecies of the streaming of the Gentiles into Jerusalem, thus ushering in the Day of the Lord. In the end, James's concerns and Paul's concerns were the same: to bring God's salvation to all people through Messiah Jesus.

One of the main purposes of the Jerusalem Council was to delineate the parameters for the twin missions to the Jews and Gentiles. While the goal was the same—to proclaim the Good News of Christ's resurrection to all people—the two missions slowly grew competitive and antagonistic, the Jewish Christians clinging ever

more tenaciously to their beliefs as the Gentile Christians increasingly expanded their understandings of Jesus beyond the parameters that could be tolerated by Judaism. John Painter gives a wonderful summary of how the embryonic Catholic Church attempted to resolve the problem of the competing missions and their diverging interpretations of Jesus, a process that can be seen at work in Luke's writing of the book of Acts:

> Acts is an attempt to hold together the position of the church of all nations toward the end of the first century with the position of the mother church of Jerusalem between 30 and 60 C.E. It is an attempt to bring together the regular practice of Jesus, which was the basis of the position of James and the Jerusalem church, with the position of Paul, which was rooted in the exceptional practice of Jesus, who at times broke through the boundaries of Jewish law, enabling the benefits of his mission to reach the outcast of Israel and even beyond to the nations. Luke acknowledged the differing approaches to mission, especially between Jerusalem and Antioch and sought to hold the two together . . .
>
> In this context James was a significant and farsighted leader whose strategy was to preserve the mission to his own people. History proved his worst fears concerning the Pauline mission to be correct. The mission to the nations indeed ensured the ultimate failure of the circumcision mission.[2]

Some of the new Hellenistic understandings of Jesus that developed in the Pauline churches, and that ultimately developed into Catholic Christianity, are what began to turn more and more Jews against the rapidly growing Christian sect, and due to that backlash, soon the Jewish Christians in the Diaspora were declared heretics by their fellow Jews and banned from their synagogues. This was a double indignity for the descendants of the original Jewish Christians (including Jesus' own family): to be branded as heretics both by their fellow Jews and by the Gentile Christians, when it was they who carried the original ortho-doxy—the actual

teachings of Jesus—which were in no way incompatible with Judaism.

Although the Jewish Christians were splintered and persecuted after 70 C.E., scattered groups such as the Nazoreans, the Ebionites and the Elkesaites managed to hang on for centuries in areas such as Syria, Egypt, and parts of Arabia—eventually even influencing the rise of Islam. The Christians that Muhammad encountered during his days leading caravans around the Arabian Peninsula were largely Jewish Christians who survived among the Arabs. So it is no coincidence that the Muslim understanding of Jesus is remarkably similar to the Jewish Christian understanding. Jewish Christian influence can also be seen in later "heretical" groups such as the medieval Cathars of the Languedoc region of France, who held many beliefs in common with the later Jewish Christians. Of course, the orthodox church had learned much about effectively combating heresy in a millennium, and the Cathars were almost completely wiped out in the Albigensian Crusade—the crusade that has the dubious distinction of being the only crusade carried out on Christendom's own soil against its own people.

Despite the tenacity of Jewish Christian beliefs and ideals, James's mission to the Jews ultimately ended in failure for the historical reasons we have delineated. But it failed only in one sense; in another sense it succeeded gloriously, for it was through Paul that the Gentiles did, in a sense, come streaming "into Israel." More and more Gentiles looked to Jesus as their Messiah. They rooted their understanding in Paul's teaching that the Gentiles were "grafted" onto Israel through their faith in Jesus:

> You Gentiles are like branches of a wild olive tree that were made to be part of a cultivated olive tree . . . And because of this, you enjoy the blessings that come from being part of that cultivated tree . . . Just remember that you are not supporting the roots of that tree. Its roots are supporting you. (Rom. 11:17–18, CEV)

The Jewish Christian fear that Paul's teaching of salvation through faith would do away with reverence for the Law among the Gentiles did *not* actually come to pass. For almost all Christians to this day, the essence of Christianity is found in its ethical guidelines for living, ethics that are thoroughly rooted in the Jewish law, particularly the Ten Commandments. In the end, no matter how loudly Christianity (especially Protestantism) has proclaimed that salvation comes by faith alone, average Christians still live their day-to-day lives as if their salvation came by their works. The Law, which James struggled so hard to uphold, is indeed still in effect for the vast majority of Christians. In the final analysis, it is inconsequential whether a Christian's desire to live a godly, ethical life comes out of a sense of duty to God ("works righteousness"), or out of a sense of thankfulness for God's undeserved love (Grace). It is the end result —transformed lives—that matters. And that is all that Jesus, James, and Paul wanted: to transform lives, to enable people to be born anew into life in the Kingdom of God.

THE RIGHTEOUS MARTYR

As we have seen, however, James ended up one of the most obsure and enigmatic figures in history as the result of a number of intertwined historical processes—the fall of Jerusalem and the decline of the Jerusalem church, the success of the Pauline mission to the Gentiles, and the emergence of the dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary in the Catholic Church. But it was not always so. For thirty years after Jesus' death, James was *the* leading figure in the early church. It can rightly be claimed that if anyone rightly deserves the titles of first "bishop" of the church, or even first "pope," it is James who justly deserves them.

What happened to James the Just and the Jewish Christian community might seem anything but just. It is bitterly ironic that what was certainly the original orthodoxy became branded as heresy. This does not, however, necessarily mean, as some of the more radical contemporary writers have asserted, that Christianity betrayed its Jewish origins or that Paul essentially "invented" Christianity by

turning an earthly Jewish Messiah into the divine Son of God. For if one truly believes that God is at work in the world and in history (if only in the Hegelian sense) then the course of events that has transpired has surely been the unfolding of God's will, and James's obfuscation may be seen to fulfill a higher purpose.

In his own lifetime, the figure of James loomed large. Because of his status as the eldest brother and successor to Jesus, the earliest Jewish Christian community, centered in Jerusalem, deferred to his leadership, and as we have seen, the Gentile Christian community outside of Palestine also deferred to his leadership. James therefore won the battle with Paul at Antioch. Years later, the Jewish and Gentile Christian communities both saw Paul publicly humiliated and defeated upon his final visit to Jerusalem, and as a result, it is likely that Paul died in a Roman prison a vanquished man. As we saw at Antioch, even Paul's closest companion, Barnabas, turned away from him and sided with James and the Jerusalem Christians. We saw, too, how the collection that Paul had gone to such great lengths to bring to Jerusalem, which he thought would be the consummation of his mission, was turned away. Rather than the glory he had envisioned, Paul saw bitter defeat. In what are likely his last written words, Paul addresses from prison one of his only remaining companions, Timothy:

> As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith . . .
>
> Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me . . . and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me . . .
>
> At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. (2 Tim. 4:6–17)

It was because of Paul's untiring efforts that "all the Gentiles" would indeed come to hear the Gospel of Jesus the Christ. While James prevailed over Paul in life, it was Paul, with whom he wrestled, who prevailed in death; for—just a few short years after Paul's death—James and Jewish Christianity were disappearing from history, while Paul's Gentile churches would go on to conquer Rome and shape two thousand years of subsequent Western civilization. James the Just would most unjustly become the forgotten hero of Christianity, and it could be argued, of Western civilization. In the end, James the Just was indeed the righteous martyr, who "died" so that his brother might live.

5

THE NATURE OF THE DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM

10

THY KINGDOM COME: A NEW PARADIGM TO REPAIR THE BREACH

> *On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old . . .*
>
> AMOS 9:11

In the last chapter we raised the question, What would Jesus have thought of the development of the early church? In this chapter we raise the further question, What would Jesus think of the state of the Christian church today? Based on his "exceptional" practice in reaching out to Gentiles, Jesus would surely have approved of Paul's mission. If we accept Paul's witness and the historicity of Acts, the risen Christ in fact commissioned that mission. As we saw, Paul's mission was the salvation of Jesus' teaching. But in that the success of Paul's mission was so harmful to Jesus' own people and kin, he would surely have disapproved. Like Jesus' voluntary death for all, James, given a choice, would certainly have willingly died so that his brother's message might live. But let us not keep crucifying James. For all the injustices that the Pauline church has visited upon not only James but all Jews to this day, Jesus surely weeps and weeps. If we are to be true to Jesus' teaching, we must, like James, not only accept others but, like Paul, actively create compromises that unite us.

Christianity may well owe its survival to the fact that at the Jerusalem Council the early church followed neither Paul's wishes nor the wishes of the more conservative Jewish Christians, but rather, thanks to James, synthesized vital insights from both sides in the stipulations of the Apostolic Decree, thus making it possible for Gentiles to enter into the new messianic community without first becoming Jews. Paul was surely right in seeing the Law, especially circumcision, as unworkable for Gentiles. And the Jewish Christians were also surely right in not wishing to lose or dilute the legacy of the Abrahamic covenant or the Law in opening the door to Gentiles. It was James who enabled Paul to continue his mission to the Gentiles on mutually agreeable terms, and it was thanks to the efforts of both Paul and James that the Gentiles did indeed come streaming "into Israel" as the prophets had foretold.

While they had their significant differences, in the end, Paul and James, true to their common Jewish heritage, understood Jesus in the same way: as the Messiah of both Israel and the nations. They both understood the new community that was gathering around Jesus to be the eschatological Israel—the beginning of the New Jerusalem foretold by the prophets and reaffirmed for the church in the vision of John of Patmos, recorded in the majestic conclusion to the Jewish Christian book of Revelation:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away . . . And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
>
> "See, the home of God is
> among mortals.
> He will dwell with them as
> their God;
> they will be his peoples,
> and God himself will be
> with them;

he will wipe every tear from
their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain
will be no more,
for the first things have
passed away." (Rev. 22:1–4)

Recorded here is the Jewish Christian community's understanding of the Day of the Lord, the consummation of all things. In light of all that we have learned about Jewish Christianity in our investigation into James, it is perhaps ironic that the book that serves as the conclusion to the Christian canon is (with the possible exception of the letters of James and Jude) the most thoroughly Jewish book in the New Testament, as evidenced, above all, by the centrality it grants to Jerusalem. The prophecies and visions recorded by John were seen by the Jewish Christian community for whom he wrote to be the fulfillment of the final prophecies of the Old Testament book of Isaiah. The most well known of these prophecies among Christians is the assigned Old Testament reading for Christmas Eve in mainline Christian churches:

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you . . .
Nations shall come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your dawn.
Lift up your eyes and look around;
They all gather together, they come to you . . .
. . . the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come . . .
All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you,

The rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you;
they shall be acceptable on my altar,
and I will glorify my glorious house. (Isa. 60:1–7)

"My glorious house," of course, refers to the Jerusalem Temple, but it is the Temple that is pointedly absent in the description of the New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation. In the conclusion to the twenty-first chapter, for example:

> I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. (Rev. 21:22–24)

In the New Jerusalem, the Temple will be replaced by the new eschatological community of all nations centered around the Lamb of God—the crucified, risen, and triumphant Messiah:

> After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white with palm branches in their hands. (Rev. 7:9)

Thus, the "Temple" in the New Jerusalem is the "body of Christ"—the eschatological community of all nations. This is the same eschatological Temple in which James, Peter, and John are the "acknowledged pillars" according to Paul himself (Galatians 2:9). Pertinently, it was only days before his death that Jesus had predicted that the earthly Temple would soon be destroyed: "Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down" (Mark 13:2), and the Temple was indeed razed by the Romans four decades later, only a few years after the death of James.

At the Jerusalem Council, some two decades or so prior to the Temple's destruction, James concluded his decision on the matter of the Gentiles with the quote noted earlier from the prophet Amos:

“After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David which has fallen, from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other people may seek the Lord” (9:11). James and the Jewish Christians believed that, through Jesus, God was restoring the House of David, and that this same Jesus, whom God had raised from the dead and lifted up to his right hand in heaven, would soon return to claim his throne and establish his Kingdom on earth.

It is important to note that one of the major beliefs common to both the Jamesian Jewish Christians and the Paulinist Gentile Christians was that God had raised Jesus from the dead, and that Jesus would soon return as the victorious conquering Messiah. In a very real sense, Jesus did return to defeat Israel’s enemies. While the Romans crucified the earthly Jesus, in the end the risen Christ did return to conquer Rome when Christianity became the official religion of the empire, even making Rome (and, pointedly, not Jerusalem) the seat of its power. It is fascinating to speculate on how differently the history of Western civilization might have played out if Jerusalem had remained the seat of Christendom.

But Christendom’s political triumph over Rome was also its Achilles’ heel—for the Church quickly succumbed to the trappings of power and wealth that Jesus and James had so firmly stood against, for which they had boldly criticized the Temple authorities, and for which they both were crushed. It is a lesson still to be learned that anytime religion becomes entwined with politics, both religion and politics are inevitably corrupted. The great wisdom of the founding fathers of the United States is seen nowhere more than in their erection of a sturdy wall of separation between church and state, something that Jesus would surely endorse, considering his command to “[r]ender unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s, and unto God that which is God’s” (Mark 12:17). In fact, it was this teaching of Jesus that laid the basis for the Western conception of the separation of the secular and the religious, a concept unheard of in major religions other than Christianity. Another factor in this development was, of course, early Christianity’s reaction to being a persecuted minority under the Roman government.

THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

The lasting wisdom of both James and Paul lies in their inclusive outlook, in their vision of Jesus as the Messiah of both Jew and Gentile. But for the past two thousand years, Paul has dominated James, which has led to many abuses within the Church, none more grievous than those toward Jews and, to only a slightly smaller extent, toward Muslims. As the Church gained political power, it became both more thoroughly Gentile and more thoroughly Paulinist, and what remained of its Jewish roots slowly died off, much to the world's detriment. Christianity's treatment of the Jews over the last two thousand years is nothing less than an inexcusable case of "parental abuse" from their children.

Today, a balance desperately needs to be restored. Today, not only the church, but our world desperately needs to recover James, and, in the process, recover the historical Jesus—a Jesus who would want nothing more than for all the children of Abraham—Jew, Christian, and Muslim—to live together in peace as one family in the Kingdom of God.

If we can reclaim James from the limbo to which he has been too long relegated, it may yet be possible to fulfill the ancient eschatological expectations of not only Jews and Christians, but of Muslims as well. Jerusalem is today a common spiritual center for the three great religions and cultures that sprang forth from Abraham—the "people of the Book," as the Qur'an calls them. Today, Jews, Christians, and Muslims all look to Abraham as their spiritual and ancestral "father" and consider themselves his heirs. Where the three branches of Abraham's family differ is in their expectation of how the Kingdom of God will be consummated.

For Christians, the Kingdom will be consummated with the return of Jesus. It was the expectation of James and the apostles that Jesus would return to the site of the Temple, and that is why James remained so closely attached to Jerusalem and to the Temple. Many Jews today, as well as many Christians, hope to one day see the Temple rebuilt on its original site. In most fundamentalist Christian eschatologies this is the last necessary step that will usher in the

return of Christ. The Temple Mount is, however, now occupied by the Dome of the Rock, one of the holiest sites for Muslims—a mosque that commemorates Muhammad's famous Night Journey to Heaven. Perhaps it is more than mere coincidence, perhaps it is even divinely ordained, that the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is the place where Jews, Christians, and Muslims find their heritages and their lives inextricably bound together.

After almost two millennia of hatred and bloodshed, many people today feel that the three great Western religions—and the political powers that are their heirs—will never be able to achieve any lasting peace. In light of such recent atrocities as 9/11 and the war with Iraq, and the escalating tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, many would agree that if the people of the Book ever needed a messiah, it is now.

Perhaps it is no accident that James the Just, after almost two thousand years of total obscurity, suddenly gained international prominence not long after September 11, 2001. While the inscription on the purported James ossuary that led to so much media hoopla —"James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus"—may yet be proven a forgery,[*24] James himself is not only the real brother of Jesus and his successor to the "throne" of Jerusalem, but he—who was called the "Brother of God"—just may be the one figure who can today bring peace to the Middle East and reunite the divided family of Abraham. In James there is a potential bridge over severely troubled water, a bridge to a common understanding of the root source of the theological estrangement of the people of the Book: Jesus.

THE WALL OF ESTRANGEMENT

As abundant evidence has shown us, after Jesus' crucifixion his family and disciples continued to worship together in the Temple in Jerusalem, manifesting no difference from their fellow Jews except in their belief that Jesus was the Davidic Messiah. Unfortunately for these harmonious beginnings, Pauline Christianity increasingly adopted an understanding of Jesus that Judaism could not ultimately bear: the Hellenistic theological belief that Jesus was literally God

incarnate in human flesh. As the doctrine of the incarnation became ever more central to Gentile Catholic Christianity, an impassible theological wall arose between Jews and Christians.

The doctrine of the incarnation is also the great wall that separates Muslims and Christians. Most Christians today are completely unaware that Muslims highly revere Jesus and honor his teachings (they even believe in the virgin birth), but like their Jewish cousins, the strict monotheism of Islam could never accept the key Christian dogmas of the incarnation and the Holy Trinity. It is therefore potentially significant for interreligious dialogue today that one of the firm conclusions modern research into James has revealed is that neither Jesus' family, nor the apostles, nor his Jewish disciples, believed that Jesus was literally God. They believed that Jesus was the Davidic Messiah, "adopted" by God as his "son" at his baptism by John, but still a human being. That the earliest Christian doctrine was in no way incompatible with Jewish doctrine is evidenced above all by the fact that the Jews in Jerusalem continued to accept Jesus' followers as fellow Jews; in fact, they saw them as being particularly rigorous and pious Jews.

It is more than intriguing that the Muslim understanding of Jesus is very much in conformity with the first Christian orthodoxy—the original Jewish Christian understanding of Jesus. As already noted, this is no coincidence, for in his extensive travels prior to receiving his first revelation from Allah, Muhammad had numerous contacts with various seventh-century Jewish Christian sects in the northwestern perimeter of the Arabian Peninsula. It would seem that their views on Jesus strongly influenced Muhammad's understanding of Jesus.

If Jewish Christianity had prevailed over Pauline Christianity, history would likely have been written quite differently. It is quite likely that such atrocities as the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Holocaust would never have transpired. If the Jewish Christian understanding of Jesus had prevailed, Jews and Christians might never have parted ways, and Islam would never have become Christianity's perceived enemy. To this day, it is the refusal of Jews

and Muslims to accept the full divinity of Jesus that makes them "pagans" and "heathens" in the eyes of many Christians.

REPAIRER OF THE BREACH

The breach between the people of the Book had already begun two thousand years before Jesus at the time of Abraham. Abraham had two sons—Isaac and Ishmael (see Genesis 16–17). Ishmael was the firstborn. According to the biblical story, Isaac is the ancestor of the Jews and Ishmael the ancestor of the Arabs. Fundamentalist Christians look upon Ishmael as an illegitimate son, and not part of the eternal covenant God made with Abraham, because he was born of the slave woman Hagar. But according to Jewish law there was certainly nothing illegitimate about the way Ishmael was born. When a woman was barren, as Abraham's wife Sarah had been, it was lawful to conceive a child through a maidservant or a concubine.[*25] And that is what Abraham legitimately did with Sarah's approval. And, apparently, God's as well, for God told Abraham that he would bless Ishmael: "I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous . . . and I will make him a great nation" (Gen. 16:10). Muslims trace their ancestry back to Abraham through Ishmael.

But when Sarah was ninety years old, God opened her womb and she conceived Isaac, through whom the Jews trace their ancestry back to Abraham. Fundamentalist Jews and Christians today make the claim that the eternal covenant God made with Abraham was continued through Isaac alone and that Ishmael and his descendants were cut off from the covenant. But while certain statements in Genesis could be interpreted that way, it is vitally important to note what Abraham did after the covenant was established (even before Isaac was born): "Then Abraham took his son Ishmael and all the slaves born in his house . . . and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day . . . And his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin" (Gen. 16:23–25). Ishmael was circumcised the very day that God concluded his covenant with Abraham. Circumcision was the sign, literally a "sign in the flesh," that one was part of the

covenant, thus making Ishmael and his descendants part of the covenant. One can see why the issue of circumcision for Gentiles was the central issue at the Jerusalem Conference.

The recovery of James and the original Jewish Christian understanding of Jesus may represent a real opportunity for more open-minded Christians, Jews, and Muslims to heal the centuries of bloodshed and misunderstanding that have divided them. James can serve as a desperately needed “missing link” between the children of Abraham. In the words of the prophet Amos that James quoted in his effort to unite Jews and Gentiles, James can today be the “repairer of the breach.”

It is highly ironic that the overarching reason for James’s obfuscation in the church’s tradition is that his very existence pointed to the real humanity of Jesus. As long as James could be ignored, the dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary, and the associated dogma of the divinity of Jesus, could be more assuredly asserted. But ever since the Enlightenment and the paradigm changes in human consciousness wrought by it, more and more Christians have come to question the doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity. Taken literally, these dogmas have not only divided Christians, Jews, and Muslims, but have also divided Christians from each other.

In point of fact, not all Christians have adhered to these dogmas, and a significant number of Christians in modern times have rejected them, the Unitarian Universalist Church being the prime example (although many Christians would say that Unitarians’ denial of the trinitarian nature of God disqualifies them from being “true” Christians). The Jehovah’s Witnesses have similarly rejected Jesus’ divine nature (and consequently they are labeled a cult by many Christians). Most “true” Christians today, however, do not realize that the divinity of Jesus was not an essential doctrine for most of the founding fathers of the United States, many of whom were Unitarians and Deists. Neither George Washington, nor Thomas Jefferson, nor Benjamin Franklin believed that Jesus was anything more than a divinely inspired and chosen human being—which is *exactly* what James and the earliest Christians believed.

The recovery of the historical James represents an unprecedented opportunity to “repair the breach” that has divided the family of Abraham. With the current resurgence of interest in the historical Jesus (especially the increasing acceptance of the Jewishness of Jesus), with the recent breakthroughs in our understanding of Paul and Second Temple Judaism, and with the recent surge of interest in James, an enormous paradigm shift seems to be looming on the horizon for the Christian faith.

To repair the breach between the people of the Book would require Muslims, Jews, and Christians to all give up the thing that most estranges them from the others—Muslims, the “wall” of the Temple Mount on which the Dome of the Rock is built; Jews, the “wall” of captured land and a literal wall in the West Bank; and Christians, the “wall” of the divinity of Jesus. These are indeed enormous sacrifices (perhaps most of all for Christians), but it is important for Christians to remember that the early church councils such as Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon were never about the *full* divinity of Jesus. Over and over again these councils, beginning with Nicaea, arrived at a compromise position in declaring that Jesus was both *fully human and fully divine.* Unfortunately, throughout most of Christian history, Jesus’ divinity has been extolled at the expense of his true humanity. And that is exactly what the recovery of James can help us to regain—the full humanity of Jesus and the reconciliation of Abraham’s descendents.

We should not be in a rush, as many modern writers seem to be, to reject the church councils outright. There is nothing inherently wrong with the theological compromise they reached. In fact, that is exactly what is needed today to reunite the people of the Book. Christians, Jews, and Muslims can all surely agree that God was in Jesus just as surely as God is within us all. This is something the early Gnostic Christians understood, something Christianity lost when it declared Gnosticism a heresy, just as it lost the full humanity of Jesus when it declared Jewish Christianity to be heresy. Perhaps the heretics still have much to teach the orthodox. And the orthodox are being forced to pay attention. It may be no accident that such

astounding archaeological findings as the Nag Hammadi library, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the James ossuary have all come to light since the middle of the last century. A revolution in the understanding of the common heritage of Jews, Christians, and Muslims is surely under way.

Most fascinating is the fact that Jerusalem is, once again, at the epicenter of religious evolution, a paradigm shift that was foreseen by the prophet Isaiah, who foretold of a future day for Jerusalem:

> *Lift up your eyes and look around;*
> *They all gather together, they come to you . . .*
> *. . . the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,*
> *the wealth of the nations shall come to you.*
> *A multitude of camels shall cover you,*
> *the young camels of Midian and Ephah;*
> *all those from Sheba shall come. . . .*
> *All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you,*
> *The rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you;*
> *they shall be acceptable on my altar,*
> *and I will glorify my glorious house.* (Isa. 60:4–7)

What is most intriguing here is the fact that Midian and Ephah, Sheba, Kedar, and Nebaioth are all Arab tribes, and, through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, it is the God of Israel who declares that their offerings, "*shall be acceptable on my altar.*" At the time this prophecy was written down, its inclusive nature was remarkable. In light of the current political climate between Jews and Muslims, the passage is perhaps the most astounding and revolutionary statement in the entire Bible. For Isaiah's vision to become reality—for Jews, Muslims, and Christians to worship at the same altar—will obviously require no less than a revolution in Jewish-Christian-Muslim understanding. But it can come to pass. God's kingdom, the kingdom foreseen by Jesus when he prayed, "Thy kingdom come," may yet become a reality. Through Jesus' brother James, God

seems to be calling us to a common *jihad*—to a holy struggle to bring reconciliation and healing to God's splintered and wounded family.

Dare we imagine a day when the children of Abraham have made Jerusalem their shared spiritual home? Dare we be so bold as to imagine the Dome of the Rock shining like a golden beacon from the center of the reconstructed Temple, together with the New Jerusalem Church of St. James standing proudly alongside? Dare we imagine Jews, Christians, and Muslims together worshiping the God of Abraham, Jesus, and Muhammad? Let us imagine as Isaiah did:

> *Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far way, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice. (Isa. 60:3–5)*

And let us heed the words God spoke through Muhammad:

> *Your community is but one community, and I am your only Lord. Therefore serve me. Men have divided themselves into factions, but to Us they shall all return. (The Qur'an 21:92–93)*

And therefore let us all take heart that Jesus' great prayer might be answered:

> *I ask . . . that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that . . . they may become completely one . . . (Jesus, John 17:20–23)*

EPILOGUE: HEALING THE WASTELAND

Fundamentalist Christians, Muslims, and Jews will not want to entertain the possibilities outlined in the last chapter, which must seem blasphemous. Fundamentalist Christians would see such theological compromise as a sign of the “end times” and the coming of the Antichrist. Even the most liberal Christians, Jews, and Muslims may say it is too idealistic, just “pie in the sky by and by.” You may say I’m a dreamer, but there are a few of us out here who are not only ready to entertain such an idea, but are ready to work toward achieving it.

If more open-minded Christians, Jews, and Muslims were to sit down at a round table to try to achieve the holy grail of peace and unity, they would certainly have to be people of vision, willing to compromise. In working out the practicalities of such a compromise, one hopes that Muslims and Jews would graciously refrain from asking Christians to completely relinquish the doctrine of the incarnation, but rather come to understand how this belief arose, and why it remains so important to many Christians. There is yet some deep theological truth to be mined in the doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity, from which Jews and Muslims might find their own understandings of God enriched.

One hopes, too, that Jews and Christians would graciously refrain from asking Muslims to relinquish their understanding of the prophet Muhammad as the mouthpiece of God’s revelation. As a Christian, I have come to believe that God continued speaking through Muhammad just as God continued speaking through Paul. I have come to believe that there are many deep theological truths in

the Qur'an that do indeed come from God, and from which Jews and Christians can find their understandings of God greatly enriched.

And one hopes that Muslims and Christians would graciously refrain from asking Jews to accept either Jesus or Muhammad as God's *final* revelation to humanity. In working together to achieve the grail, perhaps the people of the Book might all come to see that there is revelation from God still to come. Christians already know that a fuller revelation of Jesus' teaching came through Paul. Perhaps an even fuller revelation of God's truth would come if the people of the Book could combine the revelations that each of the three traditions has received thus far.

I envision a fuller revelation of God's truth forthcoming for all of the people of the Book through James. F. C. Baur was the first to recognize the true nature of earliest Christianity, partially by employing Hegel's philosophy of dialectic. At the table of the grail, Jews, Christians, and Muslims would need to employ a philosophical model that I would term *trialectic*—working toward a synthesis not of two polarities, but a synthesis of three nodes of an equilateral triangle—a trinity of truth.

The quest for the holy grail has always been a quest for truth. Today, the holy grail seems to be within our reach. To take hold of it will require an intensive, coordinated effort of those people of the Book who are sincere seekers. In the grail legends, it is said that when the grail is achieved by those who are worthy of it, it will heal the "wasteland." Through James the Just, perhaps the wasteland of the Western world can be healed at last.

FOOTNOTES

*1. The so-called new quest or third quest for the historical Jesus.

*2. Some authorities postulate 27–30 as the period of Jesus' ministry.

*3. As we shall see in chapter 9, the tradition of priestly celibacy in the Catholic church goes back primarily to Jerome and the emergence of the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary.

†4. See Mark 1:30–31; see also Mathew 8:14–15 and Luke 4:38–39.

*5. The term "synoptic" comes from the Greek, meaning to "see together" and refers to the fact that Matthew, Mark, and Luke essentially tell the same story. John's gospel is quite different in style and content from the three synoptic gospels.

*6. *Pericope* is a term scholars use to refer to a complete literary unit in the Bible.

*7. "Monkeying with a text" is a phrase I have borrowed from a beloved professor from my seminary days, Dr. Arthur Freeman, bishop in the Moravian Church, who believes there are more than a few passages in the New Testament that were "monkeyed with" by scribes and copyists.

*8. In biblical studies, the term *mainline* refers to those churches directly descended from the Catholic Church.

*9. While Matthew and Luke used Mark as the basis for their gospels (scholars call this the theory of Markan priority), they also added their own unique oral traditions (which scholars

call the special M and L sources). Comparing the three synoptics provides some evidence of what those unique traditions were.

*10. The brothers are most likely listed in order of age (the convention followed by writers of ancient literature), and it is on the basis of James's name coming first in the list that he has been universally accepted as the oldest of the four.

*11. As one of the major Jewish religious parties in New Testament times, the Pharisees were known for their strict adherence to the Law of Moses and were critical of the party of the Sadducees, who were the wealthy ruling elite in charge of the Jerusalem Temple. Christians today know the Pharisees mainly because the New Testament presents them as Jesus' opponents.

*12. This precept has been supported by statements in the gospels such as Matthew 27:50–51: "Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. *At that moment* the curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom."

*13. Bultmann proposed that we could know next to nothing about the historical Jesus, that the *kerygma* (proclamation) of his message was all that mattered. This idea held sway among liberal scholars until the 1950s when some of Bultmann's own pupils initiated the so-called new quest for the historical Jesus.

*14. See Acts 7:58: "Then they dragged him [Stephen] out of the city, and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul." See also Acts 8:1: "And Saul approved of their killing him." Saul was Paul's Jewish name prior to his conversion.

*15. There is, however, a fascinating account in *HE* 1.13.1–22 that shows that Eusebius believed Jesus could read and write. Eusebius claims to have found two letters written in Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke) in

archives located in Edessa (today known as Urfa, in eastern Turkey). In the first letter, King Abgar V of Edessa is writing to Jesus from his deathbed, asking that Jesus might cure him. The second letter is claimed to be Jesus' response, in which Jesus promises to send one of his disciples to cure him. Eusebius goes on to say that, after Jesus' ascension, Thomas sent the apostle Addai (Syriac for Thaddeus) to Edessa to effect a cure for Abgar that resulted in the entire population of Edessa converting to Christianity (*HE* 2.2.2–5).

*16. It is interesting that the James ossuary is purported to have come from an area near the Temple. See Shanks and Witherington, *The Brother of Jesus*, for details.

*17. The authenticity of the letters of James and Jude is still doubted by the majority of scholars, most believing that these are pseudepigraphal—written in the names of James and Jude by later disciples. Both are clearly Jewish Christian in character. Unfortunately, a fair examination of the letter of James is beyond the scope of this present book, although we shall say something of its main arguments later.

*18. It is worth noting that the book of Genesis says that 120 is the age to which God allowed people to live just prior to the flood (see Gen. 6:3).

*19. The *Ecclesiastical History* was completed by 324. The Council of Nicaea was held in 325 and marks the beginning of James's erasure from orthodoxy; Eusebius, being the Bishop of Caesarea, was a delegate to the council.

*20. The term *christology* refers to official doctrine or beliefs about the nature of Jesus.

† 21. Baur did not realize the full significance of James and operated under the traditional understanding that Peter was the leader of the apostles.

*22. Exegetical (from the Greek *exegesis,* literally "to draw out") and hermeneutical (from the Greek *hermeneutikos,* "to

interpret") refer to methods of interpreting the meaning of scripture. Hermeneutical refers more specifically to interpreting a passage for preaching.

*23. Ever since Bultmann, belief in the literal Davidic descent of Jesus has been suspect in liberal Christian scholarship where the Davidic sonship of Jesus has been generally understood as metaphorical. Even the idea that Jesus claimed messiahship for himself has been suspect.

*24. As of this writing, this remains a hotly debated question. See recent issues of Biblical Archaeology Review for updates on the latest tests.

*25. This was spelled out in the Law of Moses, as it was in the law codes of many other ancient civilizations where it was considered a great curse and humiliation for a wife to be barren and a man childless since they could not then further the paternal line. Provisions were thus made for a man whose wife was barren to have offspring.

ENDNOTES

Preface

1. Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus: The Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Penguin, 1997), xvii–xviii.

2. Jeffrey J. Bütz, "The Quest for James the Brother of Jesus: A Survey of the Literature and Analysis of Its Implications" (S.T.M. thesis, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, 2002).

3. For an overview of the discovery, see Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington III, *The Brother of Jesus: The Dramatic Story & Meaning of the First Archaeological Link to Jesus and His Family* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

4. John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), xi.

5. Richard Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church" in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995); Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990).

6. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, eds., *James the Just and Christian Origins*. Supplements to Novum Testamentum, vol. 98. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999); and Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner, eds. *The Brother of Jesus: James the Just and His Mission* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

7. Chilton and Evans, eds., James the Just and Christian Origins, dust- jacket notes.

8. Ibid., 5.

9. James D.G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1991), 16–17.

Introduction

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OF SOURCES

AH	*Against Heresies*
AJ	*The Apocryphon of James*
AV	Authorized Version (better known as the King James Bible)
CEV	Contemporary English Version
FAJ	*The First Apocalypse of James*
GT	*The Gospel of Thomas*
HE	*Ecclesiastical History*
KJV	King James Version
NAB	New American Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SAJ	*The Second Apocalypse of James*
SV	Scholar's Version

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