



Radio National Transcripts:

Encounter

"James, the Brother of Jesus" - Part 1: "The Missing Story"

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Produced and presented by Lyn Gallacher

Actor: (*Reading from Hegesippus*)

This man was holy from his mother's womb, drank no wine nor strong drink, nor ate anything in which was life; no razor came upon his head, he anointed himself not with oil and used no bath. To him alone it was permitted to enter the holy place; for he wore nothing woollen, but linen garments. And alone he entered into the sanctuary, and was found on his knees asking forgiveness on behalf of the people, so that his knees became hard like a camel's. For he was continually bending the knee in worship to God, and asking forgiveness for the people. In fact on account of his exceeding great justice he was called "The Just".

Lyn Gallacher: James the Just. James, the brother of Jesus, the man with the camel's knees. Who was he?

Documents written in the first century that never made it into the New Testament have a lot to say about James. So why isn't he more widely known? And why is he missing from Christian Scripture? Could there have been a cover-up? James, Jesus' brother, removed from history?

Dominic Crossan: It is not possible, I think to over-emphasise the importance of James, and it is not possible to over-emphasise the need to remedy the oblivion of James.

Lyn Gallacher: Welcome to an Encounter with James, the brother of Jesus, the most popular Jewish leader of his time. This is the first of a two-part series. I'm Lyn Gallacher.

Tourist guide: And folks, in eleven different caves scrolls were found, consisting of over 700 scrolls and bits of scrolls, over 200 of which are scriptural. The scrolls then have been brought to life and as I said it was a tremendous find for anybody of faith. But it's more than that; you know in Christianity a whole lot of questions have been raised, and we can certainly ask them a whole lot more intelligently nowadays than we used to. In other words, we have an awful lot of eye-openers, not to mention again the reference to the Old Testament --

Actor: (*Reading from Eisenman*)

The scrolls allow us to approach the Messianic Community of James with about as much precision as we are likely to have from any other source.

Lyn Gallacher: The Dead Sea Scrolls are a kind of a lever, they can help us pry open James' story.

James was a virgin and a vegetarian. He wore only linen because anything coming from an animal was considered to be unholy. He lived piously, in a world which the Dead Sea Scrolls say 'sought after smooth things', which is another way of saying it was a consumer society. James upheld the law, the law of Moses, and he spent a great deal of time in the temple, praying.

So when James was written out of the Book of Acts and the gospels, an easier, more accommodating version of Christianity was written in. It was a Christianity with wide appeal in a world where materialism wasn't completely satisfying and yet it was too hard to give up. James disappears, and Christianity becomes consumer friendly.

Actor: (*Reading from Eisenman*)

Once James has been rescued from the oblivion to which he was cast, it will also 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.

Robert Eisenman: Who and whatever James was, so was Jesus. Now that's a big mouthful, but it basically I think, if we can approach James, if we can find out who James was, and I think we can do that because his group, if it's not the same as the scrolls, parallels these scrolls in almost every way, then we can get a handle on the historical Jesus because Jesus could not have differed to any extent from his closest living relatives and those who succeeded him. The Gospels argue differently, but the Gospels have an agenda on that score. In other words, who would have known Jesus better, those who succeeded him in Palestine, those who went around with him in his whole life, or someone who never saw him before in his entire life and claims to have a rather visionary experience of him? The latter person is Paul. All history has come down on the side of the latter explanation, but my book comes down on the side of the former, that his family would have known him better, and once we find what his family was, we can find Jesus.

Lyn Gallacher: Robert Eisenman's book, 'James, the Brother of Jesus' takes 1100 pages to explain exactly how Paul's version of Jesus triumphs over James' version of Jesus. But its length aside, it's a book that stirs the imagination of its readers, because it redraws the origins of Christianity.

Karen Armstrong is one of those readers.

Karen Armstrong: Yes, that's interesting. I think there's a great deal of interest in that book, that I think we should ponder and should also, we Christians, should shake ourselves and say 'Look, why is it we take the figure of James so much for granted?' We are told Jesus doesn't have any brothers and sisters, yet we also read that James is Jesus' brother. Why do so many Christians just phase out that piece of information? We read our Scriptures very, very selectively, and Mr Eisenman's book can help us open our eyes and find all kinds of things

in our Scriptures as well as in the huge plethora of other texts, that are not included in the New Testament that throw fascinating light on what might (and I stress that word 'might') have happened.

Lyn Gallacher: By looking at the evidence, James in his day seems to have been more important than Jesus.

Robert Eisenman.

Robert Eisenman: The problem is that Jesus, we can't get a grip on, we can't get a handle on him. So we really don't know who he was. You know, you say, 'Oh well, we have these documents about Jesus' but we don't, because we just have the Gospels, and the Gospels, as more and more people are discovering, are not very reliable. So the reason James could seem more important is that we have independently verifiable, outside of the Scripture, information about James in a way that we don't do about Jesus. So it looks then, that the verifiable information about James is more substantial than the material that we can actually verify about Jesus. I know that sounds queer, but that's what the problem is.

Lyn Gallacher: And there is a lot of textual evidence about James.

Robert Eisenman: A lot. More outside the Scripture than about Jesus himself. More than about Paul, except for Paul's letters. Of course Paul's letters are pretty substantial, but outside the Scripture, we don't hear Paul hardly mentioned at all, and Peter, very little. James is one of the most substantial persons. He appears in the Nag Hammaditext as a very important personage. You can find him Eusebius' history of the early church. Eusebius relies on earlier historians like Hegesippus and Clement, and Origen, and Jerome is very big on James. I think Jerome has more to say about James than about any other illustrious person except perhaps let's say, Peter and Josephus in his Early Christian History, I think James is No.2 for him in his listing of illustrious people in the history of the early church. You just find James everywhere.

Lyn Gallacher: James is a growth industry. The time could come again when we'll find James everywhere. In the last year, three books on James have been published, and a resurgence of interest in the historical Jesus is also uncovering the importance of James, which is how Robert Crotty's work fits into the James industry.

Robert Crotty: If you're going to deal with the historical Jesus, it seems quite obvious you're going to deal with whoever James was, the brother of Jesus. And so because of that, scholars have become interested in James.

Lyn Gallacher: Do you actually think that he has been written out of the Gospels or the Book of Acts in some ways?

Robert Crotty: Oh yes, very much so. I think he was much, much more important historically than what he's given in say the Acts of the Apostles, and most certainly in the Gospels, he's been written right out of the Gospels. And part of the whole task of the historian is to explain why would he have been written out.

blood.

Actor: This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you.

BELL TOLLS

Actor: For Christians these strange actions are a living link to a man who died for them.

Lyn Gallacher: The words of the Eucharist refer back to the last supper, the meal that Jesus shared with his disciples before his crucifixion. What became the orthodox Christian understanding of the last supper, that is Jesus turning the wine into his blood and the bread into his body, is way beyond anything that Jesus could have done at the time, and it's certainly something that would have been abhorrent to James. And Gerd Ludemann is one scholar among many who believes that the last supper could never have happened.

Gerd Ludemann: Jesus could not have possibly said that the disciples were eating his body before he even had died. So in other words, the examination of the text as such has led me to the conclusion that the New Testament story of the Eucharist as it stands in the New Testament can not be used for a Christian today to participate in the Eucharist, and I did participate in the Eucharist for years every Sunday, sometimes even twice, and then this conflict came when I found out that the Eucharist was never instituted by Jesus and it takes quite a while for a religious person which I am, to say 'Well I can no longer participate in such a rite because it is just not true.' What the New Testament says about it is that Jesus did such-and-such and told the disciples that that is his body and that is his blood.

Lyn Gallacher: Why was it invented in the first place?

Gerd Ludemann: We only can guess, can say that from the very beginning, early Christianity, the last supper of Jesus was understood in a sacramental way. In other words, it was understood in the way that people who participated in it were eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood. But from the very beginning there was a common meal with sacramental elements. I would say that every religious community in the 1st century and also after that, needed something like that, a sacrament, in order to renew the community. So the need of the community as such I think created this meal, this sacramental meal. In other words, every dynamic religious community, including the Christian community, needed and need, powerful rites, rituals, in order to survive.

SINGING

Lyn Gallacher: In 1st Corinthians when Paul talks about communion in the blood of Christ, he seems to be inverting an existing Jewish symbol. Paul turns the cup, a symbol of divine retribution, into a container for the new order.

Robert Eisenman: The cup is very strong imagery, both in material about James from apocryphal gospels for instance, there is a first resurrection appearance to James in a document that Jerome conserves called the gospel of the Hebrews, and this resurrection appearance is basically on the road to

Emmaus, it parallels the road to Emmaus Lukan appearance in the Gospels as we have them. In this Gospel of the Hebrews, the first appearance is to James, and he gives the cup of the Lord to James. In the Qumran Scrolls we also have a lot of cup imagery. It's in a document your listeners might be interested in looking at called The Habakkuk Commentary, and in that document the cup of the Lord is a cup of vengeance that the people who killed the righteous teacher and his followers among the poor are themselves going to have to drink. And it's an extremely overlaid, heady sense of divine vengeance and retribution for those killing the righteous teacher as he was called. And there the cup of the Lord, as it is also in the Book of Revelation is the cup of divine vengeance that the evil sons type people are going to have to drink. In the gospels and Scriptures we have I can see it's a slightly shifted meaning through Paulinised re-interpretation that starts in 1 Corinthians where he's also attacking the dietary regulations and other things, which of course have to do with his last supper, where Jesus blesses the cup and so on.

In any event, there it is the cup that Jesus drinks and the blood that he pours out of his own cup. In any event as you know there are only Judaism and the Qumran Scrolls would not have agreed to drink blood. It was totally forbidden and in the Dead Sea Scrolls they have a horror of the whole idea of consumption of blood. And in the Book of Acts which focuses on in Chapter 15 and 21, James, that is the great James, the real James the brother of Jesus, in his role as bishop of the early community and leader of the early church, his instructions to overseas communities that Paul is labouring in 1 Corinthians, in order to produce his new version of the cup, in that particular sequence of materials, James forbids the consumption of blood, things like sacrificed idols and so on and so forth, the very things Paul is arguing against in 1 Corinthians, 6-12 where he announces communion with the blood of Christ.

SINGING

Lyn Gallacher: The kind of angst that was caused by the development of the Eucharist in the 1st century is something that we will never know. But we do know that loyal Jamesians were upset with Paul.

Dominic Crossan: There are traditions in a document which is called the Clementine Recognitions which is a rather savagely anti-Paul document, and probably does represent some influences from the earliest Jerusalem community. James is their hero; Paul is their villain. And in fact they attribute the whole failure of what you might call the mission to the Jews to Paul. Everything they say was going fine with James, in fact he was winning everyone over, and the High Priests even were coming over to his side, and then along comes Paul and they sort of fuse together in this story. Paul the Persecutor, the pre-Christian Paul, and Paul the letter-writer, the Christian apostle, and they say it's because of Paul that everything went wrong. And they always blame Paul for the death of James.

So there were currents in the early church which I would say were violently against Paul and equally violently pro-James.

Judith Lieu: I think this picture shows us that there was from the very beginning, a struggle to determine what Christian identity meant. It was a struggle, and there were different solutions to it; there was variety, so perhaps

for our faith today it is good to realise that there wasn't that ideal unity that we think we can get back to. There always has been that struggle, and that trying to work out what being a believer, a follower of Jesus means, involves struggle, probably always will involve struggle. That can be something uncomfortable to think about. Personally I think our experience of the world suggests that there's always such dilemmas.

Lyn Gallacher: Seventy years after the Common Era, Jerusalem fell and the diaspora began. By the time the Gospels came to be written, the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem had disintegrated. Paul's community thrived, and got to write history. However on close examination, this history is full of gaps and never quite manages to completely wipe out all traces of what was there before.

You can read the Letters of Paul as a contest of interpretation, just as there's a contest of interpretation in these two programs on James the brother of Jesus. Whether or not they've been meaningful or offensive will be a matter for your interpretation. And as you interpret, you'll be continuing in the tradition of the conflicting voices of James and Paul.

FANFARE

This program was made by Lyn Gallacher and Anne Marie de Betencourt.

SINGING

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Titles of some of the books:

- 'James, the Brother of Jesus' by Robert Eisenman; (Faber and Faber, 1977)
- 'James, Brother of Jesus', by Pierre-Antoine Bernheim; (SCM Press Ltd, 1997)
- 'Just James' by John Painter; (University of South Carolina Press, 1997)
- 'The Birth of Christianity' by John Dominic Crossan. (HarperSanFrancisco, 1998)
- 'The First Christian: St Paul's Impact on Christianity' by Karen Armstrong (Pan Books, 1983)
- 'The Great Peception: And What Jesus Really Said & Did' by Gerd Ludemann (SCM Press, 1998)

Encounter is broadcast every Sunday at 7.10am, every Wednesday at 7.10pm and Thursday morning at 4.05am on Radio National, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's national radio network of ideas.
