

The Apocryphon of James

Translated by Ron Cameron

The **Apocryphon of James**, also known by the translation of its title - the **Secret Book of James**, is a pseudonymous text amongst the New Testament apocrypha. It describes the secret teachings of Jesus to Peter and James, given after the Resurrection but before the Ascension.

A major theme is that one must accept suffering as inevitable. The prominence of James and Peter suggest that the work originated in the Jewish Christian community. It shows no dependence on canonical texts, and was probably written in the mid-to-late 2nd century. It has Gnostic affinities but can't be attributed to any Gnostic sect, and some scholars rule that it's not Gnostic at all.

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James writes to you. 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 which was revealed to me and Peter by the Lord, I could neither refuse you nor speak directly to you, but I have written it in Hebrew letters and have sent it to you - and to you alone. But inasmuch as you are a minister of the salvation of the saints, endeavor earnestly and take care not to recount this book to many - this which the Savior did not desire to recount to all of us, his twelve disciples. But blessed are those who will be saved through faith in this discourse.

Now I sent you ten months ago another secret book with the Savior revealed to me. But that one you are to regard in this manner, as revealed to me, James.

Now the twelve disciples were sitting all together at the same time, and, remembering what the Savior had said to each one of them, whether secretly or openly, they were setting it down in books. And I was writing what was in my book - lo, the Savior appeared, after he had departed from us while we gazed at him. And five hundred and fifty days after he arose from the dead, we said to him: "Have you gone and departed from us?"

And Jesus said: "No, but I shall go to the place from which I have come. If you desire to come with me, come."

They all answered and said: "If you bid us, we'll come."

He said: "Truly I say to you, no one ever will enter the Kingdom of Heaven if I bid him, but rather because you yourselves are full. Let me have James and Peter, in order that I may fill them." And when he called these two, he took them aside, and commanded the rest to busy themselves with that with which they had been busy.

The Savior said; "You have received mercy.... (7 lines missing) Do you not desire, then, to be filled? And is your heart drunk? Do you not desire, then, to be sober? Therefore, be ashamed! And now, waking or sleeping, remember that you have seen the Son of Man, and with him you have spoken, and to him you have listened. Woe to those who have seen the Son of Man! Blessed are those who have not seen the Man, and who have not consorted with him, and who have not spoken with him, and who have not listened to anything from him. Yours is life! Know, therefore, that he healed you when you were ill, in order that you might reign. Woe to those who have rested from their illness, because they will relapse again into illness! Blessed are those who have not been ill, and have known rest before they became ill. Yours is the Kingdom of God! Therefore I say to you, become full and leave no place within you empty, since the

Coming One is able to mock you."Then Peter answered: "Lord, three times you have said to us 'Become full', but we are full."

The Lord answered and said: "Therefore I say unto you, become full, in order that you may not be diminished. Those who are diminished, however, will not be saved. For fullness is good and diminution is bad. Therefore, just as it is good for you to be diminished and, on the other hand, bad for you to be filled, so also the one who is full is diminished; and the one who is diminished is not filled as the one who is diminished is filled, and the one who is full, for his part, brings his sufficiency to completion. Therefore, it is fitting to be diminished while you can still be filled, and to be filled while it is still possible to be diminished, in order that you can fill yourselves the more. Therefore become full of the spirit but be diminished of reason. For reason is of the soul; and it is soul."

And I answered, and said to him: "Lord, we can obey you if you wish. For we have forsaken our forefathers and our mothers and our villages and have followed you. Grant us, therefore, not to be tempted by the wicked Devil."

The Lord answered and said: "What is your merit when you do the will of the Father if it is not given to you by him as a gift, while you are tempted by Satan? But if you are oppressed by Satan and are persecuted and you do the Father's will, I say that he will love you and will make you equal with me and will consider that you have become beloved through his providence according to your free choice. Will you not cease, then, being lovers of the flesh and being afraid of sufferings? Or do you not know that you have not yet been mistreated and have not yet been accused unjustly, nor have you yet been shut up in prison, nor have you yet been condemned lawlessly, nor have you yet been crucified without reason, nor have you yet been buried shamefully, as was I myself, by the evil one? Do you dare to spare the flesh, you for whom the spirit is an encircling wall? If you contemplate the world, how long it is before you and also how long it is after you, you will find that your life is one single day and your sufferings, one single hour. For the good will not enter the world. Scorn death, therefore, and take concern for life. Remember my cross and my death and you will live."

And I answered and said to him: "Lord, do not mention to us the cross and the death, for they are far from you."

The Lord answered and said: "Truly I say to you, none will be saved unless they believe in my cross. But those who have believed in my cross, theirs is the Kingdom of God. Therefore, become seekers for death, just as the dead who seek for life, for that which they seek is revealed to them. And what is there to concern them? When you turn yourselves towards death, it will make known to you election. In truth I say to you, none of those who are afraid of death will be saved. For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who have put themselves to death. Become better than I; make yourselves like the son of the Holy Spirit."

Then I questioned him: "Lord how may we prophesy to those who ask us to prophesy to them? For there are many who ask us and who look to us to hear an oracle from us."

The Lord answered and said: "Do you not know that the head of prophecy was cut off with John?"

And I said: "Lord, it is not possible to remove the head of prophecy, is it?"

The Lord said to me: "When you come to know what 'head' is, and that prophecy issues from the head, then understand what is the meaning of 'Its head was removed'. I first spoke with you in parables, and you did not understand. Now, in turn, I speak with you openly, and you do not perceive. But it is you who were to me a parable in parables and

what is apparent in what are open.

"Be zealous to be saved without being urged. Rather, be ready on your own and, if possible, go before me. For thus the Father will love you.

"Become haters of hypocrisy and evil thought. For it is thought which gives birth to hypocrisy, but hypocrisy is far from the truth.

"Let not the Kingdom of Heaven wither away. For it is like a date palm shoot whose fruits poured down around it. It put forth leaves and, when they budded, they caused the productivity of the date palm to dry up. Thus it is also with the fruit which came from this single root; when the fruit was picked, fruits were collected by many harvesters. It would indeed be good if it were possible to produce these new plants now; for then you would find the Kingdom.

"Since I have been glorified in this manner before this time, why do you all restrain me when I am eager to go? You have constrained me to remain with you eighteen more days for the sake of the parables. It sufficed for some persons to pay attention to the teaching and understand 'The Shepherds' and 'The Seed' and 'The Building' and 'The Lamps of the Virgins' and 'The Wage of the Workers' and 'The Double Drachma' and 'The Woman'.

"Become zealous about the Word. For the Word's first condition is faith; the second is love; the third is works. Now from these comes life. For the Word is like a grain of wheat. When someone sowed it, he believed in it; and when it sprouted, he loved it, because he looked forward to many grains in the place of one; and when he worked it, he was saved, because he prepared it for food. Again he left some grains to sow. Thus it is also possible for you all to receive the Kingdom of Heaven: unless you receive it through knowledge, you will not be able to find it. "Therefore I say to you, be sober. Do not go astray. And many times I have said to you

all together - and also to you alone, James, I have said - 'Be saved!' And I have commanded you to follow me, and I have taught you the response in the presence of the rulers. Observe that I have descended, and I have spoken, and I have troubled myself, and I have received my crown, when I saved you. For I have descended to dwell with you in order that you also may dwell with me. And when I found that your houses had no ceilings over them, I dwelt in houses which would be able to receive me when I descended.

"Therefore, obey me, my brothers. Understand what the great light is. The Father does not need me. For a father does not need a son, but it is the son who needs the father. To him I am going, for the Father of the Son is not in need of you.

"Pay attention to the Word. Understand Knowledge. Love Life. And no one will persecute you, nor will any one oppress you, other than you yourselves.

"O you wretched! O you unfortunates! O you dissemblers of the truth! O you falsifiers of knowledge! O you sinners against the spirit! Do you even now dare to listen, when it behooved you to speak from the beginning? Do you even now dare to sleep, when it behooved you to be awake from the beginning, in order that the Kingdom of Heaven might receive you? In truth I say to you, it is easier for a holy one to sink into defilement, and for a man of light to sink into darkness, than for you to reign - or even not to reign!

"I have remembered your tears and your grief and your sorrow. They are far from us. Now, then, you who are outside the inheritance of the Father, weep where it behooves you and grieve and proclaim that which is good, since the Son is ascending appropriately. In truth I say to you, had it been to those who would listen to me that I was sent, and had it been with them that I was to speak, I would have never descended

upon the earth. And now, then, be ashamed on account of them.

"Behold, I shall depart from you. I am going and I do not desire to remain with you any longer - just as you yourselves have not desired. Now, then, follow me quickly.

Therefore I say to you, for your sake I have descended. You are the beloved; you are those who will become a cause of life for many. Beseech the Father. Implore God often, and he will give to you. Blessed is the one who has seen you with him when he is proclaimed among the angels and glorified among the saints. Yours is life! Rejoice and be glad as children of God. Keep his will in order that you may be saved. Take reproof from me and save yourselves. I intercede on your behalf with the Father, and he will forgive you much."

And when we heard these things, we became elated, for we had been depressed on account of what we had said earlier. Now when he saw our rejoicing, he said: "Woe to you who are in want of an advocate! Woe to you who are in need of grace! Blessed are those who have spoken freely and have produced grace for themselves. Make yourselves like strangers; of what sort are they in the estimation of your city? Why are you troubled when you oust yourselves of your own accord and depart from your city? Why do you abandon your dwelling place of your own accord, readying it for those who desire to dwell in it? O you exiles and fugitives! Woe to you, because you will be caught! Or perhaps you imagine that the Father is a lover of humanity? Or that he is persuaded by prayers? Or that he is gracious to one on behalf of another? Or that he bears with one who seeks? For he knows the desire and also that which the flesh needs. Because it is not the flesh which yearns for the soul. For without the soul the body does not sin, just as the soul is not saved without the Spirit. But if the soul is saved when it is without evil, and if the spirit also is saved, then the body becomes sinless. For it is the spirit which animates the soul, but it is the body which kills it - that is, it is the soul which kills itself. Truly I say to you, the Father will not forgive the sin of the soul at all, nor the guilt of the flesh. For none of those who have worn the flesh will be saved. For do you imagine that many have found the Kingdom of Heaven? Blessed is the one who has seen himself as a fourth one in Heaven."

When we heard these things, we became distressed. Now when he saw that we were distressed, he said: "This is why I say this to you, that you may know yourselves. For the Kingdom of Heaven is like an ear of grain which sprouted in a field. And when it ripened, it scattered its fruit and, in turn, filled the field with ears of grain for another year. You also: be zealous to reap for yourselves an ear of life, in order that you may be filled with the Kingdom.

"As long as I am with you, give heed to me and obey me. But when I am to depart from you, remember me. And remember me because I was with you without your knowing me. Blessed are those who have known me. Woe to those who have heard and have not believed! Blessed are those who have not seen but have had faith!

"And once again I persuade you. For I am revealed to you building a house which is very valuable to you, since you take shelter under it; in the same way it will be able to support the house of your neighbors when theirs is in danger of falling. In truth I say to you, woe to those on behalf of whom I was sent down to this place! Blessed are those who are to ascend to the Father. Again I reprove you. You who are, make yourselves like those who are not, in order that you may come to be with those who are not.

"Let not the Kingdom of Heaven become desolate among you. Do not become arrogant on account of the light which illumines. Rather, become to yourselves in this manner, as I am to you. For I have placed myself under the curse, in order that you may be saved"

And Peter answered to this and said: "Sometimes you urge us on to the Kingdom of Heaven, and other times you turn us away, Lord. Sometimes you persuade us and impel us to faith and promise us life, and other times you expel us from the Kingdom of Heaven."

And the Lord answered and said to us: "I have given you faith many times. Moreover, I have revealed myself to you, James, and you have not known me. Again, now I see you rejoicing many times. And when you are elated over the promise of life, are you nevertheless glum? And are you distressed when you are taught about the Kingdom? But you through faith and knowledge have received life. Therefore, scorn rejection when you hear it, but, when you hear the promise, be the more glad. In truth I say to you, the one who will receive life and believe in the Kingdom will never leave it - not even if the Father desires to banish him!

"These things I shall say to you for the present. But now I shall ascend to the place from which I have come. But you, when I was eager to go, have driven me out, and, instead of your accompanying me, you have pursued me. But give heed to the glory which awaits me, and, having opened your hearts, listen to the hymns which await me up in heaven. For today I am obliged to take (my place) at the right hand of my Father. Now I have said my last word to you. I shall part from you. For a chariot of wind has taken me up, and from now on I shall strip myself in order that I may clothe myself. But give heed: blessed are those who have preached the Son before he descended, in order that, when I have come, I may ascend. Thrice-blessed are those who were proclaimed by the Son before they came into being, in order that you may have a portion with them."

When he said these things, he went away. And we knelt down, I and Peter, and gave thanks, and sent our hearts up to heaven. We heard with our ears and saw with our eyes the sound of wars and a trumpet call and a great commotion.

And when we passed beyond that place, we sent out minds up further. And we saw with our eyes and heard with our ears hymns and angelic praises and angelic jubilation. And heavenly majesties were hymning, and we ourselves were jubilant.

After this, we also desired to send our spirits above to the Majesty. And when we ascended, we were permitted neither to see nor to hear anything. For the rest of the disciples called to us and questioned us: "What is it that you have heard from the Master?" And, "What has he said to you?" And, "Where has he gone?"

And we answered them: "He has ascended." And, "He has given us a pledge and has promised us all life and disclosed to us children who are to come after us, since he has bid us to love them, inasmuch as we will be saved for their sake."

And when they heard, they believed the revelation, but were angry about those who would be born. Then I, not desiring to entice them to scandal, sent each one to another place. But I myself went up to Jerusalem, praying that I may obtain a portion with the beloved who are to be revealed.

And I pray that the beginning may come from you, for thus I can be saved. Because they will be enlightened through me, through my faith and through another's which is better than mine, for I desire that mine become the lesser. Endeavor earnestly, therefore, to make yourself like them, and pray that you may obtain a portion with them. For apart from what I have recounted, the Savior did not disclose revelation to us. For their sake we proclaim, indeed, a portion with those for whom it was proclaimed, those whom the Lord has made his children.

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