LIFE FOR GOD · APOCRYPHA

THE GOSPEL OF THE HEBREWS

Surviving quotations and testimonies

From the edition of
M. R. James · 1924

Reading edition
Life for God

2026

About this edition

The Gospel of the Hebrews is known through quotations and reports by other authors; no complete text is available. This reading selection draws on M. R. James's 1924 edition: quotations in Clement, Origen and Jerome, reports in Eusebius, and later testimony. The labels "according to the Hebrews," "Hebrew Gospel," "Hebrew Matthew" and references to Nazarene readers do not always establish whether a single book is meant. This collection is therefore not a reconstructed continuous gospel. Sections 1–5 contain quotations with their introductory wording; 6–7 give reports about the book; 8–10 present separately labelled comparative and disputed material. The full collections attributed to the Gospels of the Nazarenes and Ebionites are not included. This work is also distinct from the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews.

The English basis consists of selected quotations and reports translated by M. R. James in The Apocryphal New Testament (1924), pp. 2–6 and 8. James's late Pseudo-Cyril testimony draws on E. A. Wallis Budge's English translation. The Russian translation was prepared by Priest Sergey Koudy for Life for God from English. The selected English passages were checked against the printed edition and web-transcription errors corrected. No independent full collation of Greek, Latin or Coptic originals was performed.

The ten sections and 22 passage numbers are Life for God reading and linking aids, not chapters of the lost gospel. Each passage names its source. Parentheses may retain James's explanation or alternative wording. Ellipses mark his abridgements, not necessarily manuscript losses. Editorial explanations are kept separate from quotations. These are selected testimonies from James's chapter, not every fragment ever assigned to Jewish-Christian gospels.

M. R. James's 1924 edition is in the public domain; the scan provider explicitly records that status. This edition uses the historical translation, not a copyrighted modern adaptation. The Russian translation was prepared by Priest Sergey Koudy for Life for God. Selection, numbering, introduction and notes: Life for God, 2026.

Online edition:

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Sources

1. M. R. James — The Apocryphal New Testament (1924), pp. 1–8
Print scan; selected quotations checked on pp. 2–6 and 8. James's historical introduction is not reproduced in full.

2. Theology on the Web — catalogue and public-domain status
Bibliographic record for the 1924 edition and its public-domain status.

3. M. R. James — Gospel of the Hebrews, transcription
Web transcription used as a working base; its errors corrected against the scan. The website's modern preface is not included.

4. Clement of Alexandria — Stromata, book II, chapter IX
A complete historical English translation of book II used to correct James's mistaken reference to book I.

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Part I. Quotations in ancient authors. Each passage identifies its transmitting source.

1. Seeking, wonder and rest

Clement of Alexandria. Stromata 2.9.45

1. Even (or also) in the Gospel according to the Hebrews is written the saying, 'he that wondereth shall reign, and he that reigneth shall rest'. [1]

Clement of Alexandria. Stromata 5.14.96

2. For those words have the same force as these: He shall not cease from seeking until he find, and having found, he will be amazed, and having been amazed will reign, and having reigned will rest. [2]

2. The Holy Spirit as mother

Origen. Commentary on John 2.12

1. And if any accept the Gospel according to the Hebrews, where the Saviour himself saith, 'Even now did my mother the Holy Spirit take me by one of mine hairs, and carried me away unto the great mountain Thabor', he will be perplexed… [3] [4]

Origen. Homilies on Jeremiah 15.4

2. And if any one receive that saying, 'Even now my mother the Holy Spirit took me and carried me up unto the great mountain Thabor', and the rest… [5]

3. The Spirit descending at baptism

Jerome. Commentary on Isaiah 11:2

1. In the Gospel I mentioned above, I find this written: And it came to pass when the Lord was come up out of the water, the whole fount of the Holy Spirit descended and rested upon him, and said unto him: My son, in all the prophets was I waiting for thee that thou shouldst come, and I might rest in thee. For thou art my rest, thou art my first begotten son, that reignest for ever. [6] [7]

4. Love for one’s brother

Jerome. Commentary on Ephesians 5:4

1. As also we read in the Hebrew Gospel: 'And never, saith he, be ye joyful, save when ye behold your brother with love.' [8]

Jerome. Commentary on Ezekiel 18:7

2. And in the Gospel according to the Hebrews which the Nazarenes are accustomed to read, it is placed among the greatest sins 'if a man have grieved the spirit of his brother'. [9]

5. The risen Lord appears to James

Jerome. On Illustrious Men 2

1. Also the Gospel called according to the Hebrews, lately translated by me into Greek and Latin speech, which Origen often uses, tells, after the resurrection of the Saviour: 'Now the Lord, when he had given the linen cloth unto the servant of the priest, went unto James and appeared to him (for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour wherein he had drunk the Lord's cup until he should see him risen again from among them that sleep)', and again after a little, 'Bring ye, saith the Lord, a table and bread', and immediately it is added, 'He took bread and blessed and brake and gave it unto James the Just and said unto him: My brother, eat thy bread, for the Son of Man is risen from among them that sleep'. [10] [11] [12]

Part II. Reports about the book. These are testimonies by other authors, not reconstructed pages of the lost gospel.

6. A report about a woman accused of sins

Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History 3.39.17 — on Papias

1. He has also set forth (or expounded) another story, about a woman accused of many sins before the Lord, which the Gospel according to the Hebrews also contains. [13]

7. Testimonies to the book’s use and transmission

Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History 4.22.8

1. Hegesippus made use in his Memoirs of the Gospel according to the Hebrews. [14]

Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History 3.25.5

2. And among them some have placed the Gospel according to the Hebrews which is the especial delight of those of the Hebrews who have accepted Christ. [15]

Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History 3.27.4

3. (The Ebionites repudiated Paul) and used only the Gospel called according to the Hebrews, making but slight account of the others. [16]

Jerome. On Illustrious Men 3 — on Hebrew Matthew

4. Further, the Hebrew itself (or original) is preserved to this day in the library at Caesarea which was collected with such care by the martyr Pamphilus. I also had an opportunity of copying it afforded me by the Nazarenes who use the book, at Beroea, a city of Syria. [17]

Stichometry of Nicephorus. List of disputed writings

5. Antilegomena of the New Testament: Apocalypse of John, Apocalypse of Peter, Epistle of Barnabas, and Gospel according to the Hebrews, 2,200 lines. [18]

Part III. Comparative material. Attribution of these passages to the same work is disputed; they are presented separately.

8. Disputed attribution: the rich man

Latin version of the Commentary on Matthew attributed to Origen

1. It is written in a certain Gospel which is called according to the Hebrews (if at least any one care to accept it, not as authoritative, but to throw light on the question before us): [19]

Latin version of the Commentary on Matthew attributed to Origen

2. The second of the rich men (it saith) said unto him: Master, what good thing can I do and live? He said unto him: O man, fulfil (do) the law and the prophets. [20]

Latin version of the Commentary on Matthew attributed to Origen

3. He answered him: I have kept them. He said unto him: Go, sell all that thou ownest, and distribute it unto the poor, and come, follow me. But the rich man began to scratch his head, and it pleased him not. And the Lord said unto him: How sayest thou: I have kept the law and the prophets? For it is written in the law: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, and lo, many of thy brethren, sons of Abraham, are clad in filth, dying for hunger, and thine house is full of many good things, and nought at all goeth out of it unto them. [21]

Latin version of the Commentary on Matthew attributed to Origen

4. And he turned and said unto Simon his disciple who was sitting by him: Simon, son of Joanna, it is easier for a camel to enter in by a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. [22]

9. Disputed attribution: bread for tomorrow

Jerome. Commentary on Matthew 6:11

1. In the Gospel called according to the Hebrews for 'super-substantial' bread I found mahar, which means 'of the morrow', so that the sense is: Our bread of the morrow, that is, of the future, give us this day. [23]

A later polemical work attributed to Cyril. The statements belong to characters in the story. A shared title does not establish identity with the gospel known to Clement and Origen.

10. A late testimony in Pseudo-Cyril

Pseudo-Cyril. Discourse on Mary — the monk’s statement as excerpted by James

1. It is written in the Gospel to the Hebrews that when Christ wished to come upon the earth to men, the Good Father called a mighty power in the heavens which was called Michael, and committed Christ to the care thereof. And the power came down into the world and it was called Mary, and Christ was in her womb seven months. Afterwards she gave birth to him, and he increased in stature, and he chose the apostles, . . . 'was crucified, and taken up by the Father'. [24] [25]

Pseudo-Cyril. Discourse on Mary — dialogue between the characters

2. Cyril asked: Where in the Four Gospels is it said that the holy Virgin Mary the mother of God is a force? The monk said: In the Gospel to the Hebrews. Then, said Cyril, there are five Gospels? Where is the fifth? The monk said: It is the Gospel that was written to the Hebrews. [26]

Pseudo-Cyril. Discourse on Mary — the ending separately quoted by James

3. 'After they had raised him up on the cross, the Father took him up into heaven unto himself.' [27]

Translation notes

1. 1:1 — James prints Stromata I.9.45. The reference is corrected to II.9.45: the saying occurs in book II, chapter 9, checked in a complete English translation of the Stromata. The words “in the Gospel according to the Hebrews” belong to Clement’s introduction to the quotation.

2. 1:2 — This second passage does not repeat the gospel’s title. The longer saying is placed alongside it as a parallel in the same author. A related sequence of seeking, finding, wonder and reigning occurs in the tradition of Thomas, saying 2; resemblance does not identify the two books.

3. 2:1 — The image “my mother the Holy Spirit” is retained. James relates it to the feminine grammatical gender of the Hebrew word for spirit. This can help explain the image, but does not establish the lost gospel’s language or identify the Spirit with Mary. Thabor is not replaced with another mountain.

4. 2:1 — Origen introduces the saying conditionally: “if any accept.” His qualification is retained. The ellipsis represents James’s abbreviated continuation, not damage to an extant manuscript of this gospel.

5. 2:2 — The version in the homily on Jeremiah lacks the detail about a hair found in 2:1. The repetition preserves how another work quotes the saying; the two forms are not combined.

6. 3:1 — Jerome cites the passage while commenting on Isaiah 11:2 and associates his source with Nazarene readers. Thus even this named citation does not settle how Jewish-Christian gospels should be distinguished. “The whole fount” retains the metaphor of the Spirit’s fullness.

7. 3:1 — The Russian feminine forms follow the maternal image of the Spirit found in related testimony. The English first-person wording does not itself mark gender. This is a translation choice, not a claim to have checked a lost Semitic manuscript.

8. 4:1 — Jerome gives the words about joy and love in his commentary on Ephesians 5:4. Their conditional form is preserved; an explanatory moral is not inserted into the saying.

9. 4:2 — Grieving a brother's spirit is retained as the source's expression. The reference to the greatest sins belongs to Jerome's report about the book; it is not a complete list of those sins.

10. 5:1 — The opening claim to have translated the gospel into Greek and Latin is Jerome's. It is not the publication statement of this edition, nor does it give us access to his lost translations.

11. 5:1 — Jerome joins excerpts with "after a little" and "immediately it is added." His method of quotation is retained without inventing transitions. The priest's servant receives the linen cloth but is unnamed; identifying him as Malchus would be conjecture.

12. 5:1 — "James the Just" is the designation in the quotation Jerome includes in his chapter on James, the Lord's brother. The report of an appearance to James may be compared with 1 Corinthians 15:7, which does not narrate the bread, oath or linen cloth.

13. 6:1 — "He" refers to Papias, whom Eusebius is discussing. Eusebius reports a story without supplying its full text here. Neither the woman nor a specific sin is named; John 7:53–8:11 is not inserted in place of the missing testimony.

14. 7:1 — This is a brief report of a source used by Hegesippus. It does not quote the material he took from the gospel.

15. 7:2 — "Among them" refers to Eusebius's discussion of categories of church writings. Reporting that some included a book in a particular group does not mean Eusebius himself accepted it into an agreed canon.

16. 7:3 — The statement about the Ebionites is Eusebius's report; the parenthesis supplies James's compressed context. A shared title in different authors does not prove they read the same recension. The separate collection of Ebionite testimony is outside this selection.

17. 7:4 — Here Jerome is speaking about Hebrew Matthew. Its identity with every other passage called the Gospel of the Hebrews is

not assumed. “To this day” refers to Jerome’s time, not to the present state of a library in Caesarea.

18. 7:5 — Stichometry measures length in lines, not modern verses or chapters. The recorded figure is 2,200. James’s comparison—300 fewer lines than Matthew—is moved from the list to this note. The figure cannot reconstruct the lost pages.

19. 8:1 — The passage survives in the Latin version of a commentary on Matthew associated with Origen. James distinguishes this case from Origen’s secure quotations; the insertion’s exact origin is not established here. Its qualification about non-authoritative use is retained.

20. 8:2 — “The second of the rich men” presupposes context this excerpt does not supply. A story about the first rich man is not reconstructed.

21. 8:3 — The rebuke contrasts a claim to keep the law with failure to help hungry brothers. The detail of the man scratching his head is retained. Comparison with Matthew 19:16–24 does not turn this version into Matthew’s text.

22. 8:4 — The unusual “son of Joanna” follows James and is not silently changed to a more familiar name. The needle’s eye is rendered literally; the source gives no account of a city gate bearing that name.

23. 9:1 — Mahar is retained as the word recorded by Jerome. “Super-substantial” renders the term he is discussing in the bread petition. The interpretation “of the morrow” is Jerome’s report, not a new collation of an Aramaic manuscript.

24. 10:1 — James quotes this story through E. A. Wallis Budge’s Miscellaneous Coptic Texts (1915), p. 637. It is a later work attributed to Cyril, not a verified transcript of Cyril of Jerusalem. The claim about a power named Michael and seven months is spoken by the monk whom another character challenges.

25. 10:1 — The ellipsis reflects James’s abridgement. James himself does not identify the book mentioned here with the gospel discussed

earlier. The material is included separately as evidence for the use of the title.

26. 10:2 — The question about five gospels is a line within a polemical narrative. It reports neither the discovery of a fifth manuscript nor the contents of an early library.

27. 10:3 — James separately gives the fuller ending of the sentence he previously abridged. It is therefore not appended to 10:1 as a new event. The lack of a separate reference to resurrection does not by itself prove its denial; it may reflect compression.