

LIFE FOR GOD · APOCRYPHA

THE GOSPEL OF THE NAZARENES

Testimonies, quotations and variant readings

From the edition of
M. R. James · 1924

Reading edition
Life for God

2026

About this edition

No complete manuscript of a Gospel of the Nazarenes survives. Under this title we offer a reading selection of testimony connected with Nazarene readers and Hebrew-language gospels, drawn from M. R. James's 1924 edition. James places these materials in his chapter on the Gospel according to the Hebrews; the present grouping is not represented as a separate edition of a Nazarene gospel by James. Ancient titles and reports do not always distinguish the books. Sections 1–7 contain reports by Epiphanius and Jerome and quotations they transmit. Sections 8–10 offer comparative and disputed material; 11 gives manuscript marginal readings of “the Jewish” Gospel; 12 contains late medieval reports. Some passages also appear in our Gospel of the Hebrews selection, with the overlap explained in notes. These testimonies do not reconstruct a continuous life of Jesus.

The English basis is a selection of passages translated or reported by M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1924), pp. 2–8, in the public domain. The Russian translation was prepared by Priest Sergey Kouidy for *Life for God* from English. The English passages were checked against the printed scan and transcription errors corrected. No independent full collation of Greek, Latin or Syriac texts or medieval codices was performed.

The twelve sections and 39 passage numbers are *Life for God* reading aids, not ancient numbering or the order of a lost gospel. Each passage identifies its transmitting source. Parentheses may contain James's alternatives and explanations; ellipses mark his abridgements. Matthew variants remain short reports of readings, without supplying missing verses. This selection is not a complete modern critical collection of every testimony.

This edition uses M. R. James's historical 1924 public-domain work, as identified by the scan provider's catalogue. The transcription website's modern preface is excluded. The Russian translation was prepared by Priest Sergey Kouidy for *Life for God*. Selection, structure, numbering 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

Selected testimonies and readings checked against pp. 2-8 of the scan. The original chapter is titled The Gospel according to the Hebrews.

2. Theology on the Web — catalogue and public-domain status

Bibliographic record of the historical edition and its public-domain status.

3. M. R. James — Gospel of the Hebrews, transcription

Working web transcription; errors corrected against the printed scan.

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Reports about the book and quotations in ancient works. A reference to Nazarene readers does not settle which book each author used.

1. Testimonies to the Nazarenes' book

Epiphanius. Panarion 29.9.4 — on the Nazoraeans

1. They have the Gospel according to Matthew quite complete, in Hebrew: for this Gospel is certainly still preserved among them as it was first written, in Hebrew letters. I do not know if they have even removed the genealogy from Abraham to Christ. ^[1]

Jerome. On Illustrious Men 3 — on Hebrew Matthew

2. 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. ^[2]

2. Baptism and the descent of the Spirit

Jerome. Dialogue against the Pelagians 3.2

1. In the Gospel according to the Hebrews which is indeed in the Chaldaean and Syrian speech but is written in Hebrew letters, which the Nazarenes use to this day, called 'according to the apostles', or, as most term it, 'according to Matthew', which also is to be seen in the library of Caesarea, the story tells: Behold, the mother of the Lord and his brethren said unto him: John Baptist baptizeth unto the remission of sins; let us go and be baptized of him. But he said unto them: Wherein (what) have I sinned, that I should go and be baptized of him? unless peradventure this very thing that I have said is a sin of ignorance. ^[3] ^[4]

Jerome. Commentary on Isaiah 11:2 — opening excerpt

2. (The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him) not partially as in the case of other holy men: but, according to the Gospel written in the Hebrew speech, which the Nazarenes read, 'There shall descend upon him the whole fount of the Holy Spirit'...^[5]

Jerome. Commentary on Isaiah 11:2

3. 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]}

3. 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.^[8]

Jerome. On Psalm 135 — James's reference

2. In the Hebrew Gospel according to Matthew it is thus: Our bread of the morrow give us this day; that is, 'the bread which thou wilt give us in thy kingdom, give us this day'.^[9]

4. The mason with a withered hand

Jerome. Commentary on Matthew 12:13

1. In the Gospel which the Nazarenes and Ebionites use (which I have lately translated into Greek from the Hebrew, and which is called by many (or most) people the original of Matthew), this man who has the withered hand is described as a mason, who prays for help in such words as these: 'I was a mason seeking a livelihood with my hands: I pray thee, Jesu, to restore me mine health, that I may not beg meanly for my food.' [10] [11]

5. Forgiveness and a brother's spirit

Jerome. Dialogue against the Pelagians 3.2

1. And in the same book: If thy brother (saith he) have sinned by a word and made thee amends, seven times in a day receive thou him. Simon his disciple said unto him: Seven times in a day? The Lord answered and said unto him: Yea, I say unto thee, unto seventy times seven times. For in the prophets also, after they were anointed by the Holy Spirit, the word of sin was found. [12] [13]

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'. [14]

6. Readings reported by Jerome

Jerome. Commentary on Matthew 2:5

1. Bethlehem of Judaea. This is a mistake of the scribes: for I think it was originally expressed by the Evangelist as we read in the Hebrew, 'of Judah', not Judaea. ^[15]

Jerome. Letter 20 to Damasus — on Matthew 21:9

2. Matthew, who wrote his Gospel in the Hebrew speech, put it thus: Osanna barrama, i.e., Osanna in the highest. ^[16]

Jerome. Commentary on Matthew 23:35

3. In the Gospel which the Nazarenes use, for 'son of Barachias' I find 'of Joiada' written. ^[17]

Jerome. Commentary on Matthew 27:16

4. This Barabbas, in the Gospel entitled (written) according to the Hebrews, is interpreted 'son of their master' (teacher). ^[18]

7. The broken temple lintel

Jerome. Commentary on Matthew 27:51

1. In the Gospel I so often mention we read that a lintel of the temple of immense size was broken and divided. ^[19]

Jerome. Letter 120 to Hedibia, 8

2. But in the Gospel that is written in Hebrew letters we read, not that the veil of the temple was rent, but that a lintel of the temple of wondrous size fell. ^[20]

Comparative testimony to the risen Lord. These words are also transmitted through Ignatius; their gospel source is not securely established.

8. The risen Lord: not a bodiless spirit

Jerome. On Illustrious Men 16 — quoting Ignatius

1. Of the Epistle of Ignatius 'to Polycarp' (really to Smyrna). In it he also inserts a testimony about the person of Christ, from the Gospel which was lately translated by me; his words are: But I both saw him (this is wrongly quoted) in the flesh after the resurrection, and believe that he is in the flesh: and when he came to Peter and those who were with Peter, he said to them: Lo, feel me and see that I am not a bodiless spirit (demon). And forthwith they touched him and believed. ^{[21] [22]}

Jerome. Commentary on Isaiah, preface to book 18

2. For when the Apostles thought him to be a spirit, or, in the words of the Gospel which is of the Hebrews which the Nazarenes are wont to read, 'a bodiless demon', he said to them (Luke xxiv. 38). ^[23]

Comparative material. Eusebius speaks of a gospel in Hebrew without naming Nazarene readers here. Attribution to their book remains uncertain.

9. Comparative testimony in Eusebius

Eusebius. Theophany 4.12 — preserved in Syriac

1. As we have found somewhere in the Gospel which the Jews have in the Hebrew tongue, where it is said: I choose for myself them that are good (or well pleasing): the good are they whom my Father which in heaven giveth (or hath given) me. ^[24]

Eusebius. Theophany — an excerpt also preserved in Greek

2. But since the Gospel written in Hebrew characters which has reached our hands turns the threat not against the man who hid the talent, but against him who had lived riotously (for it told of three servants, one who devoured his master's substance with harlots and flute-girls, another who multiplied it by trading, and another who hid the talent; and made the one to be accepted, another only rebuked, and another to be shut up in prison), the question occurs to me whether in Matthew, after the conclusion of the speech against the man who did nothing, the threat that follows may refer, not to him, but by epanalepsis (i.e. taking up a former subject again) be said of the first, who ate and drank with the drunken. ^[25]

This narrative survives in the Latin version of a commentary on Matthew associated with Origen. Attribution is disputed. It also appears in section 8 of our Gospel of the Hebrews selection.

10. 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):
[26]

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.^[27]

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.^[28]

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.^[29]

Marginal readings in gospel manuscripts listed by James. “The Jewish” is their source label; identity with the Nazarenes’ book is not assumed. Matthew references locate the comparison, not chapters of the lost gospel.

11. Marginal readings of “the Jewish” Gospel

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 4:5 — in James

1. The Jewish copy has not 'unto the holy city' but 'in Jerusalem'. ^[30]

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 5:22 — in James

2. The word 'without cause' is not inserted in some copies, nor in the Jewish. ^[31]

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 7:5 — in James

3. The Jewish has here: If ye be in my bosom and do not the will of my Father which is in heaven, out of my bosom will I cast you away. ^[32]

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 10:16 — in James

4. The Jewish has '(wise) more than serpents' instead of 'as serpents'. ^[33]

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 11:12 — in James

5. (The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence.) The Jewish has: 'is ravished (or plundered)'. ^[34]

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 11:25 — in James

6. (I thank thee (lit. confess unto thee), O Father.) The Jewish: 'I give thee thanks.' ^[35]

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 12:40 — in James

7. The Jewish has not: three days and three nights (in the heart of the earth). [36]

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 15:5 — in James

8. The Jewish: Corban by which ye shall be profited by us. [37]

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 16:2-3 — in James

9. Omitted by 'the Jewish' (as by many extant manuscripts). [38]

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 16:17 — in James

10. The Jewish: (Simon) son of John. [39]

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 18:22 — in James

11. The Jewish has, immediately after the seventy times seven: For in the prophets, after they were anointed with the Holy Spirit, there was found in them a word (matter) of sin. [40]

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 26:74 — in James

12. The Jewish: and he denied and swore and cursed. [41]

Marginal note of “the Jewish” Gospel at Matthew 27:65 — in James

13. The Jewish: And he delivered unto them armed men, that they might sit over against the cave and keep it day and night. [42]

Late reports recorded many centuries after the early Christian authors. On their own they do not prove these episodes belonged to an early Gospel of the Nazarenes.

12. Late medieval reports

Haimo of Auxerre. Commentary on Isaiah 53:12 — medieval testimony

1. For, as is contained in the Gospel of the Nazarenes, at this word of the Lord many thousands of Jews that stood round about the Cross believed. ^[43]

Thirteenth-century note on Petrus de Riga's Aurora — on the cleansing of the Temple

2. In the books of the Gospels which the Nazarenes use it is read that rays issued from his eyes whereby they were terrified and put to flight. ^[44]

Translation notes

1. 1:1 — Epiphanius reports a book used by the Nazoraeans. His claim of completeness and subsequent uncertainty about the genealogy are retained together. This is his testimony, not a modern inspection of a complete surviving manuscript.

2. 1:2 — “To this day” refers to Jerome’s time. He is discussing Hebrew Matthew; this designation does not identify it with every other passage in the selection. The same passage appears in Gospel of the Hebrews 7:4.

3. 2:1 — “Chaldaean and Syrian” is Jerome’s terminology, not a label for two of our translations. He distinguishes language from Hebrew script. The library reference and alternative book titles belong to his report.

4. 2:1 — The reply about a sin of ignorance retains its qualification “unless.” It is neither replaced with the canonical baptism narrative nor turned into an unqualified admission of sin.

5. 2:2 — Jerome first contrasts the fullness of the Spirit with the inspiration of holy people, then gives a longer excerpt. The ellipsis marks James’s abridgement, not a damaged leaf of the lost gospel.

6. 2:3 — The same passage appears in Gospel of the Hebrews 3:1. Repetition makes the material Jerome connects with Nazarene readers available here; it does not prove that two distinct ancient texts contained these identical words.

7. 2:3 — The Russian feminine forms follow the maternal image of the Spirit found in this tradition. English first-person forms do not mark gender. This is a translation choice, not the result of an independent collation of a Semitic original.

8. 3:1 — Jerome explains mahar as “of the morrow.” “Super-substantial” reflects a Latin attempt to translate the difficult Greek word in Matthew 6:11 literally. This is testimony to a reading, not proof that the lost book was identical to canonical Matthew. See also Gospel of the Hebrews 9:1.

9. 3:2 — Psalm 135 follows James's reference. This passage offers a form of the same petition with an explanation about the future kingdom. The two witnesses' formulations are not merged into a single quotation.

10. 4:1 — The mason's occupation and request not to beg expand the story of the withered hand; these words are not in Matthew 12:13. The claim to have translated the gospel into Greek belongs to Jerome.

11. 4:1 — The mention of Nazarenes and Ebionites is retained as Jerome's wording. It does not establish that their gospels were one work. James separately questions the reference to Ebionites; his judgement is not substituted for the quotation.

12. 5:1 — James explains "sinned by a word" and "word of sin" as Semitic expressions meaning "sinned in anything" and "somewhat of sin." The literal wording is retained; it need not restrict forgiveness to verbal offences.

13. 5:1 — Seven times a day and seventy times seven belong to different turns in this dialogue. They should not be harmonized into one canonical formulation. The continuation about prophets recurs in marginal reading 11:11.

14. 5:2 — "Grieving a brother's spirit" is Jerome's reported expression. He names the Nazarenes explicitly, but the identity of all the gospels he names remains uncertain. See also Gospel of the Hebrews 4:2.

15. 6:1 — Jerome contrasts geographical "Judaea" with the name "Judah." His explanation of scribal error is qualified as his opinion: "I think." It does not replace modern examination of Matthew manuscripts.

16. 6:2 — The letter is addressed to Damasus, not the city Damascus. The web transcription's erroneous Damascus is corrected in the source label against the print. Osanna barrama retains James's transliteration.

17. 6:3 — "Of Joiada" concerns Zechariah's patronymic. It may be compared with Zechariah son of Jehoiada in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. That comparison does not establish the origin of the whole gospel.

18. 6:4 — This concerns an interpretation of Barabbas's name, not an additional episode in his life. "Master" and "teacher" retain the alternatives given by James.

19. 7:1 — A lintel is the horizontal member above an opening. Its breaking should not be silently replaced with the tearing of the curtain in the canonical narrative.

20. 7:2 — This second witness explicitly contrasts curtain and lintel. "Was broken and divided" and "fell" are retained as separate formulations.

21. 8:1 — The parentheses "really to Smyrna" and "this is wrongly quoted" are James's comments retained within his presentation. He compares the opening with Ignatius, Smyrnaeans 3.1: "For I know, and I believe that he is in the flesh even after his resurrection." This is not a reason to silently rewrite Jerome's quotation.

22. 8:1 — The saying about a bodiless spirit also circulates in other contexts; James points to Origen's citation from the Teaching of Peter. Inclusion here does not establish a unique gospel source. In this context "demon" need not carry its modern sense of an evil spirit.

23. 8:2 — The excerpt ends with the Luke 24:38 reference as in James. Jesus' following speech is not supplied. Resemblance to 8:1 permits comparison without turning the excerpts into a continuous story.

24. 9:1 — Eusebius does not name the Nazarenes here; the quotation is comparative material. The reference to Syriac preservation concerns the transmission of his Theophany, not a complete surviving gospel manuscript.

25. 9:2 — This is Eusebius's discussion of a variant parable, not the complete parable verbatim. He mentions three actions and three outcomes. We do not assign the outcomes more precisely than the excerpt does.

26. 10:1 — The basis is the Latin version of the commentary on Matthew, called Pseudo-Origen by James. The origin of the insertion is not independently established here. "Not as authoritative" belongs to its own introductory qualification.

27. 10:2 — “The second of the rich men” presupposes context absent from this excerpt. A story about a first rich man is not reconstructed.

28. 10:3 — The rebuke connects the claim to keep the commandments with the hunger of one’s brothers. It should not be quoted as the verbatim text of canonical Matthew.

29. 10:4 — James’s unusual Joanna is retained rather than silently replaced with a familiar patronymic. Passages 10:1–4 repeat Gospel of the Hebrews 8:1–4 because their attribution is disputed.

30. 11:1 — “In Jerusalem” is a variant at Matthew 4:5. All thirteen marginal readings in this section follow James’s list; the medieval codices have not been independently collated.

31. 11:2 — The absence of “without cause” is not a separate complete saying. It concerns the qualification in the statement about anger, which also varies within the manuscript tradition of canonical Matthew.

32. 11:3 — James prints the locator Matthew 7:5; it is retained without guessing a replacement. The saying about closeness to Jesus without doing the Father’s will differs from the canonical verse. James compares it with 2 Clement 4.5; resemblance does not establish a shared book.

33. 11:4 — The note contrasts “more than serpents” with “as serpents.” James places “wise” in parentheses to supply context.

34. 11:5 — Both English alternatives in James indicate forceful seizure. The note does not provide a full explanation of the agent intended.

35. 11:6 — The distinction between the English expressions is easily lost in Russian: both are rendered in terms of thanks, with the literal “confess unto thee” retained parenthetically. This is a lexical note, not two conflicting teachings.

36. 11:7 — The note reports the absence of “three days and three nights”; James gives the wording about the heart of the earth parenthetically as context. The full verse of the lost source cannot be reconstructed from this alone.

37. 11:8 — Corban denotes a dedicated gift. This short note does not preserve the whole saying about support for parents. James's suggested completion following it is not inserted as surviving text.

38. 11:9 — Only the omission of Matthew 16:2-3 is reported here. James's list supplies no replacement wording.

39. 11:10 — "Son of John" is retained as the name variant in the marginal note. It differs from Joanna in the rich man narrative, 10:4; the difference is not harmonized.

40. 11:11 — A similar continuation occurs in Jerome's quotation at 5:1. James treated this as proof of the sources' identity. The parallel is shown here without automatically adopting that stronger conclusion.

41. 11:12 — The subject is Peter in the denial scene. The object of the curses is not named and should not be supplied.

42. 11:13 — The cave and armed guards belong to the reported variant. The note does not establish these men's nationality or institutional affiliation.

43. 12:1 — James presents this as a report in Haimo of Auxerre, about 850, commenting on "Father, forgive them." A medieval gospel title does not prove independent access to an early text. "Many thousands" is the report's assertion, not verified statistics.

44. 12:2 — The thirteenth-century note concerns the cleansing of the Temple. James includes it hesitantly: it may recall Jerome's commentary on Matthew 21:12, which also describes fiery light in Jesus' eyes. It is presented as late testimony, not attached to securely identified words of an early gospel.