

LIFE FOR GOD · APOCRYPHA

THE GREEK GOSPEL OF THE EGYPTIANS

Salome, sayings and testimony

From M. R. James's edition
of 1924

Reading edition
Life for God

2026

About this edition

The Greek Gospel of the Egyptians is known through quotations and reports by ancient authors; no continuous text is available. The central part of this selection comprises sayings transmitted by Clement of Alexandria while discussing continence, marriage, birth and death. Accompanying explanations are retained, with the transmitting author's voice identified. James's summary of Origen, reports by Hippolytus and Epiphanius about books with the same title, and a comparative saying from Second Clement are presented separately. The identity of all the books mentioned is not assumed. These are eight editorial sections containing ten passages from M. R. James's 1924 selection, not a reconstructed complete Gospel. The Coptic Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit, also called the Gospel of the Egyptians, is a different work and is not included.

The Russian translation was prepared by Priest Sergey Koudy for Life for God. The basis is M. R. James's English translation and selection, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1924), pp. 10–12. The excerpts were checked against the printed scan and transcription errors corrected. The Russian version is translated from this English basis. No independent full collation against Greek editions was performed.

Section and passage numbers are Life for God reading aids, not chapters and verses of the lost book. The first four sections contain six excerpts from Clement, followed by three external reports and one parallel. The arrangement is thematic. Each source label identifies the transmitting work. Parentheses retain explanations and alternatives in the historical translation; Russian quotation marks and paragraphing distinguish the speakers.

The historical basis is M. R. James's public-domain 1924 edition. Modern commercial translations are not reproduced. The Russian translation was prepared by Priest Sergey Koudy for Life for God. Structure, introduction and notes: Life for God, 2026.

Online edition:

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Sources

1. M. R. James — The Apocryphal New Testament (1924), pp. 10-12

Printed basis of all ten passages; section 5 is James's summary and section 8 a separately labelled parallel.

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

Bibliographic record and public-domain designation.

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

Working transcription checked against print; the omission in the Origen report and typographical errors are corrected.

4. Clement of Alexandria — Stromata III.13.92-93

Consulted to identify the boundary between Cassian's quotation and Clement's reply. This modern translation is not reproduced.

5. NASSCAL — Gospel of the Egyptians

Bibliographic index of ancient witnesses.

6. NASSCAL — Gospel of the Egyptians (Coptic)

Separate entry for the Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit, which is not included here.

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Three transmissions of one saying. The words of Salome and the Lord are surrounded by the transmitting author's discussion, which is not part of Jesus' speech.

1. Salome on death and birth

Clement of Alexandria. Stromata III.9.64 — saying and commentary

1. Whence it is with reason that after the Word had told about the End, Salome saith: Until when shall men continue to die? (Now the Scripture speaks of man in two senses, the one that is seen, and the soul: and again, of him that is in a state of salvation, and him that is not: and sin is called the death of the soul) and it is advisedly that the Lord makes answer: So long as women bear children. ^[1] ^[2]

Clement of Alexandria. Stromata III.6.45 — saying and commentary

2. The Lord said to Salome when she inquired: How long shall death prevail? 'As long as ye women bear children', not because life is an ill, and the creation evil: but as showing the sequence of nature: for in all cases birth is followed by decay. ^[3] ^[4]

Clement of Alexandria. Excerpts from Theodotus 67 — interpretation of the saying

3. And when the Saviour says to Salome that there shall be death as long as women bear children, he did not say it as abusing birth, for that is necessary for the salvation of believers. ^[5]

2. The plant that has bitterness

Clement of Alexandria. Stromata III.9.66 — saying and commentary

1. And why do not they who walk by anything rather than the true rule of the Gospel go on to quote the rest of that which was said to Salome: for when she had said, 'I have done well, then, in not bearing children?' (as if childbearing were not the right thing to accept) the Lord answers and says: Every plant eat thou, but that which hath bitterness eat not. ^[6] ^[7]

Clement first quotes Julius Cassian and then replies to him. The second paragraph is Clement's reply identifying the source of the saying.

3. When the two become one

Clement of Alexandria. Stromata III.13.92-93 — Cassian's quotation and Clement's reply

1. When Salome inquired when the things concerning which she asked should be known, the Lord said: When ye have trampled on the garment of shame, and when the two become one and the male with the female is neither male nor female.

In the first place, then, we have not this saying in the four Gospels that have been delivered to us, but in that according to the Egyptians. ^[8] ^[9] ^[10]

4. “The works of the female”

Clement of Alexandria. Stromata III.9.63 — saying and its interpretation

1. But those who set themselves against God's creation because of continence, which has a fair-sounding name, quote also those words which were spoken to Salome, of which I made mention before. They are contained, I think (or I take it) in the Gospel according to the Egyptians. For they say that 'the Saviour himself said: I came to destroy the works of the female'. By female he means lust: by works, birth and decay. ^[11] ^[12] ^[13]

This is James's historical summary, not a verbatim quotation of Origen or a fragment of the Gospel itself.

5. Origen on the title of the book

Origen. Homilies on Luke 1 — M. R. James's summary

1. Origen, in his first Homily on Luke, speaks of those who 'took in hand' or 'attempted' to write gospels (as Luke says in his prologue). These, he says, came to the task rashly, without the needful gifts of grace, unlike Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke himself. Such were those who composed the Gospel which is written 'according to the Egyptians' and the Gospel entitled 'of the Twelve'. ^[14] ^[15]

Testimony to a book with the same title. Its identity with the source of Jesus' dialogue with Salome is not assumed here.

6. The report about the Naassenes

Hippolytus. Refutation of All Heresies V.7 — report of the book's use

1. (The Naassenes) say that the soul is very hard to find and to perceive; for it does not continue in the same fashion or shape or in one emotion so that one can either describe it or comprehend it in essence. And they have these various changes of the soul, set forth in the Gospel entitled according to the Egyptians. ^[16]

The polemical judgement is Epiphanius's. This is a report of a book's contents and use, not Jesus' verbatim speech. Its identity with Clement's source is not established.

7. The report about the Sabellians

Epiphanius. Panarion 62.2 — report about the Sabellians

1. Their whole deceit (error) and the strength of it they draw from some apocryphal books, especially from what is called the Egyptian Gospel, to which some have given that name. For in it many suchlike things are recorded (or attributed) as from the person of the Saviour, said in a corner, purporting that he showed his disciples that the same person was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. ^[17] ^[18]

Comparative material. The author does not name the Gospel of the Egyptians; resemblance between sayings does not by itself prove direct borrowing.

8. A parallel: Second Clement

Second Clement 12.2 — parallel, not an established quotation of the Gospel of the Egyptians

1. For the Lord himself being asked by some one when his kingdom should come, said: When the two shall be one, and the outside (that which is without) as the inside (that which is within), and the male with the female neither male nor female. ^[19] ^[20]

Translation notes

1. 1:1 — The parenthesis is Clement’s discussion of humanity and the death of the soul, not Jesus’ reply. The capitalized Word follows James’s designation of Christ.

2. 1:1 — This is the first of three transmissions of one saying in this collection. Their wording is kept distinct; the repetitions are not assembled into an imagined continuous dialogue.

3. 1:2 — The phrase “not because life is an ill...” is Clement’s explanation. He rejects an interpretation condemning creation and birth. The entire paragraph must not be attributed to Jesus as a single direct speech.

4. 1:2 — Decay in the selected English basis concerns dissolution and mortality following birth. The argument about the natural sequence is retained; no teaching about the moral corruption of newborn children is supplied.

5. 1:3 — Excerpts from Theodotus names a collection transmitted among Clement’s works. Here the saying is reported and interpreted; this is not a new question from Salome or an additional Gospel scene.

6. 2:1 — Salome’s question follows James’s rendering: “I have done well, then, in not bearing children?” This identifies the historical translation adopted here; it does not imply that all modern translations construe the sentence identically.

7. 2:1 — Plant and bitterness are retained as images. The short saying is not replaced with a settled interpretation about marriage, food or a particular commandment. The introductory objection and parenthesis belong to Clement.

8. 3:1 — In Stromata III.13.92 Clement is quoting Julius Cassian. In III.13.93 he replies that the saying is in the Gospel of the Egyptians. James places both portions under 92; the reference here is expanded to 92–93, and the boundary is marked by a paragraph break.

9. 3:1 — Garment of shame is retained without supplying a complete interpretation. The images of two, unity, male and female do not by themselves establish a particular ritual.

10. 3:1 — Compare the parallel in section 8 and Galatians 3:28. Similar wording does not make these texts interchangeable. Section 8 has the contrast of outside and inside, absent from Clement's quotation; this passage instead has the garment of shame.

11. 4:1 — "I think (or I take it)" retains the transmitting author's qualification and James's English alternative. The attribution is not turned into an unqualified bibliographic assertion.

12. 4:1 — The Russian "женское начало" renders the female; "начало" makes the Russian expression readable and does not designate a separate deity. The following explanation of lust, birth and decay belongs to the transmitting discussion, not to the Saviour's direct speech.

13. 4:1 — Clement discusses the use of sayings by opponents of marriage and argues against them. This short, indirectly transmitted passage should not be presented as a universal Christian norm concerning women, marriage or childbearing.

14. 5:1 — This is James's own summary of Origen's first homily on Luke. The judgement on Gospel writers is reported as Origen's view, not adopted as an established fact about the authors.

15. 5:1 — The web transcription omits the reference to the Gospel "according to the Egyptians", leaving only "of the Twelve". The omission is restored from printed page 10 of the 1924 edition. This corrects a transcription, not a lost ancient manuscript.

16. 6:1 — Hippolytus reports the Naassenes' use of a book and various changes of the soul. He does not quote a separate saying of Jesus here. The shared title does not guarantee identity with the text quoted by Clement.

17. 7:1 — "Deceit (error)" is Epiphanius's polemical characterization. The statement concerning Father, Son and Holy Spirit is his account of others' teaching, not a verbatim Gospel quotation or an editorial assertion.

18. 7:1 — The Russian “spoken in secret” renders James’s said in a corner. This testimony has not been established as referring to the source of the dialogue with Salome; it is retained among external reports about a similarly named book.

19. 8:1 — So-called Second Clement is a separate work, distinct from Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata*. This parallel neither names Salome as the questioner nor identifies its source as the Gospel of the Egyptians.

20. 8:1 — The parentheses are James’s English explanations, also rendered into Russian. The saying is included for comparison; it must not be cited as an assuredly surviving verse of the Gospel of the Egyptians.