

16. Eisenman, Robert, *James the Brother of Jesus: The Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Penguin Books 1997)

You may have got to this page by another route, but I am coming at it after reading item # 33 and learning of the possibility that there was some bad stuff going on that led to James getting rid of Peter, or at least his really appreciating Peter's leaving, so he could rescue his brother's movement from the libertarians that had taken it over, all claiming to be beyond the law because his brother said so.

So, first things first. How did Peter and James get along according to Eisenman? Not bad. James was in charge of the community, he sent people out to conduct community business outside Jerusalem. Peter was one he sent on such missions.

Did James capture the community of libertine scoff-Laws and drag it back into obedience to the Law? Not according to Eisenman. The opposite, in fact. His last three sentences neatly sum up his entire book (p. 963):

Once James has been rescued from the oblivion into which he was cast, abetted by one of the most successful rewrite enterprises ever accomplished –the Book of Acts (and one of the most fantastic)– it is necessary to deal with the new constellation of facts the reality of his being occasions. It will also no longer be possible to avoid, through endless scholarly debate and other evasion syndromes, the obvious solution to the problem of the Historical Jesus – the question of his actual physical existence as such aside - the answer to which is simple. Who and whatever James was, so was Jesus.

So, he rejects the idea that he discusses at length that James was elected the apostle to replace Judas Iscariot. He shows through very complex but sense-making arguments that Jesus' movement was a family enterprise that had several brothers and other relatives in prominent roles from the start. It is later when the need for an virgin mother to explain a miraculous birth of a God arose that they were wiped out of the picture, since the existence of brothers contradict an ever- virgin mother. The point is that this was a Jewish sect started by a family, then came Paul and there was strife and conflict, but a grudging allowance of Paul into the circle of special witnesses, with reference to the offerings brought by Paul to a very needy community in Jerusalem.

Peter is seen as a missionary witness traveling and working under James' direction. He is painted as one vacillating between James' stricter expectations regarding the Law, and Paul's looser ones. Paul plays a very big role in this book, defining through his eyes and writings the relationship between peter and James: there is never a question about who is really in charge. James. And in the same rewrite of history that moved Jesus' brothers into obscurity, the very enemies of James, the Romans were raised in esteem while the people supportive of and supported by James, the Jews, were vilified.

Eisenman's is a total rewrite of history. It is a compelling rewrite. The only thing that really, really bothers me is that if this were so, and Jesus was just like James who took over from him to follow in his footsteps and meet martyrdom a few decades later, why do we even know his name and the name of his brother? Why was this not some other unknown sect within a Jerusalem rife with sects all of which perished or were dispersed before the end of the first century? Paul is the reason given. He co-existed, but not peacefully, with James and caused the community to grow outside its Jewish

boundaries. This is going back to Maccoby's picture of Paul inventing a Christianity that was quite foreign to the Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem.

So, again, I have exactly the same problem. Freke and Gandy solve it for me by saying that there was a conspiracy that invented Jesus to embody every expectation ever had about the intrusion of the Divine into the mortal. I find that bizarre.

So, Eisenman does not satisfy me. Freke and Gandy do not satisfy me. Maccoby does not satisfy me. I go back to Daniélou. There is the path that explains all of the phenomena observed and shows that Paul saved the Christian religion by Hellenizing it. Sure. But it existed before Paul, it was what he was persecuting. Would Paul have persecuted James' movement the way it is described by Eisenman? Good question. What does Eisenman say?

It is as confusing to me as he says the record itself is. But he intimates that Paul was a cousin of Herod Agrippa, hence a Roman citizen and a relative of the ruling High priests for whom he is a thug, stealing from groups not in favor and seen as not supporting the temple priesthood hierarchy collaborating with Rome. So it isn't Christianity that is being persecuted, it is another band of zealots against the ruling party, and the object is to discomfit them and steal. Paul is a religiously employed thug. An organized crime pawn who runs to the quisling administration for protection when he is threatened. Gag.

He tries to kill James. James survives. Paul is converted and becomes an ally of James, in some ways, a rival in other ways, and an enemy in yet other ways. Then when the Romans wipe out James and disperse what remains of his community, Paul wins it all.

Eisenman thus has a lot in common with the views of the other scholars cited here, but I still like Daniélou's version the best. It has all of the above facts covered, yet still recognizes there was something special about Jesus that the movement later named after him existed and persisted, changed as it may have been.