Identity, Death, and Ascension in the First Apocalypse of James and the Gospel of John

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Abtract

In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares himself to be the way to the Father; in the First Apocalypse of James, Jesus explains exactly what this way entails. This article analyzes how 1 Apoc. Jas. uses the Johannine christological themes of identity, death and ascension and makes them applicable for human salvation. The identity of Jesus as a son of the Father, as opposed to the inhabitants of the world/cosmos, his autonomous death that conquers cosmic evils, and his immediate ascension and fleshly return are all Johannine motifs that are reformulated in 1 Apoc. Jas. Jesus reveals to James that he too is a son of the Father, and James must declare this identity during his postmortem journey through the celestial toll-collectors. He must not fear his impending stoning as, like other martyrdom literature, the martyr is immune to earthly concerns, and the real challenge lies in the cosmic sphere.

Keywords

Gospel of John, First Apocalypse of James, Nag Hammadi, identity, death, ascension, martyrdom, monasticism

Introduction

The First Apocalypse of James narrates two conversations between Jesus and his "brother" James, one before Jesus's death and ascension and one following his return from these events. The text describes an ascension christology that becomes an ascension soteriology: after his death, Jesus ascends through the realms of cosmic

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toll-collectors and a guard, and James must likewise to reach his "roots." Both Jesus and James overcome the toll-collectors by declaring that they belong to the "Preexistent Father" (ⲡⲓⲱⲧ ⲉⲧⲱⲟⲟⲡ ϧⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲱ[ⲟⲣⲡ̄])[1] as opposed to the female power Achamoth, mother to the toll-collectors who produced them without the consent of the Father. In 1 Apoc. Jas., Jesus reveals to James their shared identity as sons of the Preexistent Father and, through his death, he shows the archons that sons of the Preexistent Father cannot be overpowered. His own postmortem ascension then paves the way for James to follow him into heaven.

The "dialogue gospel" has three main sections: the two conversations between James and Jesus, separated by Jesus's departure, death, and return, and a revelatory section that states that Jesus's teaching is to be handed down to Addai, then to Manael, then to Levi, and finally to Levi's son who will communicate it to others.[2] Before this time, it is to be kept secret. The first two sections are the focus of this paper.

Although 1 Apoc. Jas is commonly dated to the late second/early third century, we only know it from later manuscripts.[3] Today, 1 Apoc. Jas. exists for us in three recensions: the Coptic Nag Hammadi Codex V 3 (NH), the Coptic Codex Tchacos 2 (CT), and a recently discovered, yet-to-be published Greek manuscript.[4] The two Coptic codices are dated to the fourth century and the Greek manuscript to the sixth. As will be discussed briefly later, the extent to which Johannine motifs are developed in the two Coptic versions are largely the same. For the purpose of this study, CT is better preserved than NH and will be the manuscript predominantly used in this paper. Where it makes better sense to use the NH recension, or where the versions offer different readings, this will be explained.

The First Apocalypse of James shows knowledge of Valentinianism.[5] This includes the discussion of the oneness of God existing before plurality stemming

[1] Also known as or the "Preexistent One" (ⲱⲟⲣⲡ̄ ⲛ̄ⲱⲟⲟⲡ) and "the One Who Is" (ⲡⲉⲧⲱⲟⲟⲡ).

[2] 1 Apoc. Jas. is classified here as a "dialogue gospel," as it has the central figure of Jesus speaking with a disciple, along with a narrative frame that provides a realistic historical setting. On this designation, see Sarah Parkhouse, *Eschatology and the Saviour: The Gospel of Mary among Early Christian Dialogue Gospels* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[3] For the date, see e.g., Wolf-Peter Funk, "Die erste Apokalypse des Jakobus (NHC V,3 / CT 2)," in *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung, Band I: Evangelien und Verwandtes* (ed. Christoph Markschies and Jens Schröter; 2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) 2:1152–81, at 1156.

[4] The NH recension, which is rough and fragmentary, has not received a lot of scholarly attention. The only published monograph is Armand Veilleux, *La Première Apocalypse de Jacques (NH V, 3); La Seconde Apocalypse de Jacques (NH V, 4)* (BCNHT 17; Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1986). Codex Tchacos is in better condition but was only published in 2007. The Greek manuscript was recently discovered in Oxford by Geoffrey Smith and Brent Landau and presented for the first time at the 2017 SBL Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism meeting. It has not yet been published. The Coptic texts can be found in William R. Schoedel, "(First) Apocalypse of James," in *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2–5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4* (ed. D. M. Parrott; NHS 11; Leiden: Brill, 1979) 68–103; *The Gospel of Judas: Critical Edition* (ed. Rodolphe Kasser and Gregor Wurst; Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2007) 120–61.

[5] On 1 Apoc. Jas. as a Valentinian text, see e.g., Einar Thomassen, "Notes pour la délimitation

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from "femaleness," and the female being Achamoth who does not have a father (she is "a female from a female" [NH 35.12–13]). Achamoth has become ignorant of her mother, Sophia, and has produced the toll-collectors. Furthermore, the dialogue that James must expect to have with the cosmic guard and toll-collectors is paralleled in Irenaeus's explanation of a "gnostic" ἀπολύτρωσις ritual in *Haer.* 1.25.1.

The text appears to have been compiled from a number of sources, some ascribing to Valentinian theology and others not, and much of what it refers to is implied but not explained. It would seem that the reader (or hearer) should have knowledge not only of the basic Christian story, including the incarnation, passion, and resurrection, but also of Valentinian theological speculation such as the identity of Achamoth, whose story is only cursorily described.[6] Evidently, 1 Apoc. Jas. uses other gospel material, including Luke and John.[7] A firm connection between 1 Apoc. Jas. and Luke is found in James's words as he is being stoned: "My Father [in] heaven, forgive them, for they do (not) know what they do" (30.24–26; cf. Luke 23:34).[8] Another connection might be found in the interpretation of the twelve disciples (which become twelve archons) and seventy-two pairs (which become the seventy-two lesser heavens), which shows possible knowledge of the seventy-two disciples sent out in pairs in some versions of Luke 10:1–24.[9]

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d'un corpus valentinien à Nag Hammadi," in *Les Textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification* (ed. Louis Painchaud and Anne Pasquier; BCNHE 3; Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1995) 243–63. Recently, however, Thomassen has changed his mind about whether 1 Apoc. Jas. is Valentinian and argued that the text uses Valentinian sources (including that which Irenaeus used for his description of the ritual) but did not necessarily ascribe to Valentinian theology itself (Einar Thomassen, "The Valentinian Materials in *James* [NHC V,*3* and CT,*2*]," in *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels* [ed. Eduard Iricinschi et al.; Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity 82; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013] 79–90).

[6] Brankaer and Bethge argue that the implicit reader/hearer must be familiar with the Achamoth-Jesus myth, and James also displays knowledge of the myth by asking about femininity (Johanna Brankaer and Hans-Gebhard Bethge, *Codex Tchacos: Texte und Analysen* [TU 161; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007] 163–254, at 166).

[7] It also shares connections with other "noncanonical" gospels such as Wis. Jes. Chr. and Ap. Jas. An unexplained reference is to the seven female disciples that James asks about and that the reader should presumably know about. Seven female disciples are found in Wis. Jes. Chr., though represented differently, which might suggest a common tradition that predates either writing. See Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (NHS 40; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 71. Ap. Jas. refers to another "apocryphon" in which Jesus has taught James (alone) what to say before the archons (8.31–36). Hartenstein argues that the only way to make sense of these statements in Ap. Jas. is as a reference to 1 Apoc. Jas. (Judith Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre* [TUGAL 146; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000] 229–32).

[8] Luke 23:34 is missing in a number of important early manuscripts, which raises the question of which version of Luke 1 Apoc. Jas. had available. On Luke 23:34a in early Christian literature, see Nathan Eubank, "A Disconcerting Prayer: On the Originality of Luke 23:34a," *JBL* 129 (2010) 521–36.

[9] Wolf-Peter Funk, "The Significance of the Tchacos Codex for Understanding the First Apocalypse of James," in *The Codex Judas Papers: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Tchacos Codex Held at Rice University, Houston, Texas, March 13–16, 2008* (ed. April DeConick; NHMS 71; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 509–33, at 527. Petersen does not make this connection but does raise the point that 1 Apoc. Jas. uses "normal human beings" from the NT in connection with the

The way in which 1 Apoc. Jas. uses John is the focus of this paper. The later gospel text takes up christological themes of the Fourth Gospel and makes them applicable to James, thus rendering them consequential for the readers as followers of Jesus. These themes include Jesus's divine identity in relation to the earthly "Jews," his role as the descending, ascending, and returning revealer, and the parallelism of Jesus's identity and his followers. As Jesus is portrayed in John as the stranger from heaven, he is contrasted with the world, the cosmos, and its inhabitants. His suffering at the crucifixion is deemphasized and his autonomy stressed in John; and this is also applied in 1 Apoc. Jas. to James, who must not fear the stoning that is destined for his fleshly body. Bodily suffering is so minimized in 1 Apoc. Jas. that the text fits well with other martyrdom literature, which commonly divorces the unsuffering "self" from the suffering flesh.[10] Shortly after Jesus's empowered death in John, he ascends to the Father and then returns to his disciples (or so it can be read), and this is the same sequence of events that we find in 1 Apoc. Jas. Jesus's ascension in John prepares the way for the ascension of the disciples, and in 1 Apoc. Jas. Jesus tells James exactly what he can expect on his way up: he can expect to face a guard and toll-collectors, whom he can overpower by declaring his divine identity in contrast to their inferior parentage.

The Relationship of the Gospel of John and the First Apocalypse of James

In the early centuries of Christianity, as detailed and competing theologies were being developed, authors received and used John in a number of ways. We do not know what the second- or third-century form of 1 Apoc. Jas. looked like, and it is not possible to draw conclusions regarding the extent to which the earliest forms of this text knew and used John. However, John could be used creatively in the earliest centuries, and it is possible that Johannine themes are detectable in the earliest forms of 1 Apoc. Jas., and even inspired its composition.[11] Christians in the fourth century certainly knew and used John, and it is possible that the later versions of 1 Apoc. Jas. were edited in line with Johannine themes. As noncanonical texts were

cosmological process (Silke Petersen, "'Die sieben Frauen—sieben Geistkräfte sind sie'. Frauen und Weiblichkeit in der Schrift 'Jakobus' [CT 2] und der [ersten] Apokalypse des Jakobus [NHC V,3]," in *Judasevangelium und Codex Tchacos. Studien zur religionsgeschichtlichen Verortung einer gnostischen Schriftensammlung* [ed. Enno Edzard Popkes and Gregor Wurst; WUNT 297; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012] 189–211, at 205–6). For other interpretations of the number seventy-two in 1 Apoc. Jas., see Brankaer and Bethge, *Codex Tchacos*, 181 n. 78.

[10] Examples of this include the Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas, the martyrdom of Blandina and the Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius, which will all be discussed later in this article.

[11] On the reception of John in the 2nd and 3rd cents., see e.g., Titus Nagel, *Die Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums im 2. Jahrhundert. Studien zur vorirenäischen Auslegung des vierten Evangeliums in christlicher und christlisch-gnostischer Literatur* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 2; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstal, 2000); Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); *The Legacy of John: Second-Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Tuomas Rasimus; NovTSup 132; Leiden: Brill, 2010).

transmitted more freely than canonical texts, we can expect the Coptic versions to have a number of variants, and some interesting work has been produced on the question of how these variants have the potential to change certain interpretations within the gospel.[12] However, whether one edition of 1 Apoc. Jas. shows more concern to assimilate the text to John is not evident. The points at which the editorial activity that produced the differences between the NH and CT versions cause one recension or the other to sound more Johannine are inconsistent.[13] The argument of this paper is that 1 Apoc. Jas. uses the Johannine motifs of identity, death, and ascension and applies them to James as a model of the Christian disciple. This is not specific to a certain manuscript, and we could reasonably expect such Johannine themes to be detectable in earlier editions of 1 Apoc. Jas. Without these themes, it would not be the same text. The question here is not if 1 Apoc. Jas. used John, but how. What themes did our author(s) pick up from the Fourth Gospel and for what purposes did s/he use them? How was the Johannine Jesus made relevant to the readers/hearers of 1 Apoc. Jas.?

In discussions regarding textual reception, we should not limit ourselves to quotations or plausible allusions, as can be the starting point in many studies.[14] Writers of gospels, both canonical and noncanonical, received and used their source texts liberally and selectively.[15] And they were able to do so because they utilize Jesus as a living, speaking, revealing character. For 1 Apoc. Jas., as for the author of, say, Luke or the Apocryphon of John, there is no need to signpost to or cite a

[12] E.g., Brankaer and Bethge, *Codex Tchacos*, 163–254; Funk, "The Significance of the Tchacos Codex," 509–33; Lance Jenott, "Reading Variants in James and the Apocalypse of James: A Perspective from New Philology," in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions* (ed. Liv Ingeborg Leid and Hugo Lundhaug; TU 175; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017) 55–84.

[13] Possible examples of editing in line with Johannine themes include: "I am second from the One Who Is" (CT 10.18–19) and "[I] am before you" (NH 24.25–26), in which the NH version may suggest redaction in line with John 1:15, 30; and "I am the Son" (CT 20.12) and "I am a Son" (NH 33.16–17), in which the CT version is more Johannine. There do not appear to be consistent signs of one Coptic version amplifying the Johannine language or motifs over the other version; see e.g., nn. 25, 28, 30, 43, 44, 46, 66, 67.

[14] See Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett, "Reflections on Method: What Constitutes Use of the Writings That Later Formed the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers?," in *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (ed. Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett; The New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers 1; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 61–82.

[15] This mode of "reception" might be compared to "rewritten Bible." Brakke argues that many writings of the New Testament and noncanonical gospels were written through "received scriptures [that] provided the materials for the writing of new revelations . . . often provoked through scriptural study" (David Brakke, "Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity: Towards a New History of the New Testament Canon," in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Traditions in Antiquity* [ed. Jörg Ulrich, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, and David Brakke; Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 11; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012] 263–80, at 274). On a free use of sources in antiquity, see e.g., John Whittaker, "The Value of Indirect Tradition in the Establishment of Greek Philosophical Texts, or the Art of Misquotation," in *Editing Greek and Latin Texts: Papers given at the Twenty-Third Annual Conference on Editorial Problems; University of Toronto 6–7 November 1987* (ed. John N. Grant; New York: AMS, 1989) 63–95.

precursor text because the "Word of God" comes from the Son of the highest God himself. For these authors, no earlier gospel text was more authoritative than the narratives or dialogues that they were writing. And so, for 1 Apoc. Jas., why cite John when you can have Jesus?

Among the small body of literature on 1 Apoc. Jas., two main scholars have noted the text's links to the Gospel of John.[16] Judith Hartenstein, working only with the NH version, understands 1 Apoc. Jas. as a "zweite Lehre," a second teaching, to the canonical narratives.[17] She understands 1 Apoc. Jas. to have a strong connection to John 20:14–18, as "in John 20:17, Jesus announces his ascension to the Father. Such an ascent is the main theme of the narrative frame to the revelation in 1ApcJac."[18] The mode of reception, she argues, is that 1 Apoc. Jas. uses John as a background to create its own narrative but does not explicitly signal its relationship.[19] Mikael Haxby, who primarily uses the CT version, writes that Jesus's instructions to James regarding the dialogue with the cosmic archons reflect "a complex and creative reading of John," and particularly John 7–8.[20] These chapters share the themes of self-knowledge, identity, origin, and destination—which will all be discussed later. For Haxby, 1 Apoc. Jas. uses John in a specific way: it "picks up on a moment of fracture in John, where the text is unsystematic in its presentation of ethics and christology, and draws from the text a broader, more complete ethical program."[21] This ethical program, he argues, is that knowledge of Christ may shape the moral formation of the disciple, and that John 7–8 is used as an exhortation to martyrdom.

Both Hartenstein and Haxby note the creative and playful way that 1 Apoc. Jas. uses John, and they highlight the themes of identity and ascension. Their work shows that John can be received without signposting, and that the reception was

[16] Brankaer and Bethge have also noted similarities between John and the CT version of 1 Apoc. Jas., such as the departure of Jesus, his death (or his "lot") enabling his ascension, James as "the other Paraclete," and Jesus's dignified death as comparable to Jesus's in John 18:1–8 (Brankaer and Bethge, *Codex Tchacos*, 196, 199, 208, 253).

[17] Although there are "no clear quotations or allusions," knowledge of the canonical gospels is likely due to the presumed time of composition and the references to the basic story (e.g., James, disciples, passion) (Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 211).

[18] Ibid., 212. Other connections to John 20:14–18 include: 1) the use of the name "Rabbi"; 2) James embracing Jesus, which contrasts to the "do not touch me" of John 20:17; and 3) Jesus calling James "the one who saw (ⲛⲁⲩ) me" (NH 32.4) and Mary saying "I saw (ⲛⲁⲩ) the Lord" (John 20:18). Hartenstein also notes connections to themes in the farewell discourse, such as the "comforter" of 1 Apoc. Jas. being reminiscent of the Johannine παράκλητος, as well as Jesus originating from and returning to the Preexistent Father, and the preparation of the way through Jesus. For the Coptic version of John, see G. W. Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect Otherwise Called Sahidic and Thebaic*, vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911).

[19] Hartenstein., 214.

[20] Mikael Haxby, "The First Apocalypse of James: Martyrdom and Sexual Difference" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013) 67–71. The reception of John extends beyond chs. 7–8, as 1 Apoc. Jas. uses the distinctively Johannine terminology of "the ones who are mine and not mine" (cf. 11.5–7) from John 1:11–12. This "connects a set of themes regarding the children of God, the reception of Christ, and the recognition of the people who are one's own" (Ibid., 70).

[21] Ibid., 78.

tackling questions that the Johannine Jesus left unanswered.[22] In the following, I will show that 1 Apoc. Jas. is interested in answering: If Jesus is "the way" to the Father in John (14:6), then what exactly is this way? How precisely does one follow Jesus to God? The answers lie in understanding one's identity, undergoing death to overcome the cosmic powers, and following Jesus's ascension through the cosmos.

Identity

A. Jesus and James as Sons of the Father

The First Apocalypse of James opens with Jesus's declaration: "Now, since I see the end of my redemption (ϣⲱⲧⲉ), I shall tell you these things, my brother James" (10.1–3). The things that Jesus refers to are his identity, and James's, in relation to the divine and earthly: he is from the Preexistent Father, as is James, but the guard and toll-collectors are from Achamoth, who brought them forth without the Father.

The main themes in this opening sentence are departure and revelation. This will be the final conversation between James and Jesus before Jesus's crucifixion, and Jesus acknowledges that it is only "since" he is about to leave him that he will reveal their shared identity and redemption. This concept draws from the Johannine farewell discourse. The Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is famous for his role as revealer, but it is less frequently pointed out that his revelations are linked to his looming departure. Jesus tells his disciples: "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you, but now I am going to the one who sent me" (John 16:4b–5a). Like the Jesus of 1 Apoc. Jas., Jesus here is admitting that he previously withheld truths from his disciples, but his imminent departure necessitates soteriological revelation.

The predominant revelation of the Johannine Jesus is his identity. Questions of origin (πόθεν) and destiny (ποῦ) permeate the gospel. Even before Jesus is involved, the priests and Levites ask John the Baptist "Who are you?" (1:19) and he responds by declaring his identity in relation to Jesus's identity. The "Jews" want to know how Jesus, son of Joseph, can claim to have come down from heaven (6:42) and continue this line of questioning in chapters 7–8. At the trial, Pilate asks Jesus to declare where he is from (19:9) and then assigns Jesus the title "King of the Jews" (19:19). What Jesus reveals, to those who understand, is that "he has been sent by God and that God is his Father."[23] He is the "stranger from heaven and Son of God."[24] The farewell discourse and the following prayer also reveal the role of the disciples

[22] The "ethical program" discussed in Haxby's work is not relevant for this paper, as 1 Apoc. Jas. does not focus on moral formation but on knowledge.

[23] John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 493.

[24] Marinus de Jonge, *Jesus, Stranger from Heaven and Son of God: Jesus Christ and the Christians in Johannine Perspective* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977). Also, Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972) 44–72.

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in relation to Jesus. They are sent into the world (17:18) to bear witness (15:27), just as Jesus was sent to bear the Father's words (14:24); they have received "the words" that Jesus received (17:8), as well as the glory (17:22) and love (17:26); and they are hated by the world, just as Jesus is (15:18; 17:16). Jesus's departure necessitates that the Johannine disciples are to take on certain of his characteristics.

Comparable to John in linking the origin and destiny of Jesus with that of James (and other disciples), 1 Apoc. Jas. takes the link further by developing an ontological identity shared between Christ and his followers . This is illustrated in the opening passage: "But *you* are ignorant about *yourself*, so that [I] shall tell you who *I* am (ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲛⲓⲏ)" (10.5–7).[25] It is revealed that as Jesus has descended from the Father, James has likewise; as Jesus will ascend through the archons, so will James. Jesus tells James that when James ascends, he will be assimilated to the Father: "You will reach the One Who Is, and no longer will you be James, but one who in every way is in the One Who Is" (13.24–14.2). Thus, 1 Apoc. Jas. connects Johannine christology and human salvation.

With regard to the questions of origin and destination, it is the dialogue between Jesus and the "Jews" in John 7–8 that finds particular parallels in 1 Apoc. Jas.[26] In John, as Jesus teaches in the temple, a debate breaks out regarding whether he is the Messiah.[27] Jesus declares that his testimony is valid, because "I know where I have come from and where I am going," but the Pharisees "do not know where I come from or where I am going" (8:14). Jesus's testimony is that he has been sent by the Father (8:18) and that he will soon leave and is "going to the one who sent me" (7:33). Continuing with the Jesus-disciple parallelism, this conversation mirrors the dialogue that James must expect with the soul-collecting powers in 1 Apoc. Jas. As James ascends through the cosmos, he will meet a guard who will ask him: "Who are you and where are you from?" James is to say "I am the Son, and I am from the Father" (20.10–13).[28] The guard will also ask "Why have you come?" and James is to say "I have come to all those who are mine and those who

[25] The NH version reads: "I am not ignorant about you, so that when I give you a sign, know and listen" (24.16–19). Jenott writes: "Whereas NHC V is ambiguous as to what James needs to learn, the version in CT states that the solution to his self-ignorance is to learn about Jesus" (Jenott, "Reading Variants," 68). Brankaer and Bethge argue that in CT knowledge is seen as a part of or a condition of salvation, whereas in the NH knowledge is the goal of salvation (Brankaer and Bethge, *Codex Tchacos*, 176).

[26] Haxby, "First Apocalypse of James," esp. 69. Thomassen points toward non-Christian materials as the inspiration behind this dialogue in 1 Apoc. Jas.—for example, the Orphic Gold Tablets (Einar Thomassen, "Gnostics and Orphics," in *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer* [ed. Jitse Dijkstra, Justin Kroesen, and Yme Kuiper; SHR 127; Leiden: Brill, 2010] 463–74; and, more recently, idem, "Valentinian Materials in *James*").

[27] As John 7:53–8:11 is not part of the original text, 8:12 presumably continues in the temple; cf. 8:59.

[28] The NH version reads "I am a Son" (NH 33.16–17), likewise the Irenaean parallel reads "a Son" (cf. Epiphanius *Pan.* 36.3.2). This may suggest that CT has been redacted toward John. Interrogations concerning one's heavenly origins and destination are also found in Gos. Thom. 50 and Gos. Mary 15.13–16.16. 1 Apoc. Jas. is particularly close to John due to the echo of John 1:11.

are not mine" (ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲉⲓ ϣⲁ ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩⲓ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩⲓ ⲁⲛ, 20.23–25), echoing John 1:11 (εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν // ⲁⲫⲉⲓ ϣⲁ ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩϥ).[29] James must finally tell the guard, "I will go to those who are mine, to the place from which I have come" (ⲉⲉⲓ[ⲛ]ⲁⲃⲱⲕ᾽ ϣⲁ ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩⲓ ⲛⲉ ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲁ ⲛⲧⲁⲉⲓⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ, 21.17–18), and then he will be saved. The descending-ascending Jesus, who tells his disciples in John, "I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father" (16:28), parallels the disciple of 1 Apoc. Jas. who has come into the world and will return to the Father.

Although the identities of Jesus and James are paralleled, as sons of the Father, they are far from identical. James describes Jesus as being uncontaminated by his incarnation: "For you descended (ⲁⲕⲉⲓ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ) into a great ignorance, but you have not been defiled by anything in it. For you descended (ⲁⲕⲉⲓ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ) into a great mindlessness, and your recollection remained" (NH 28.11–16).[30] James then compares himself with Jesus, saying that unlike Jesus, coming into the world has made him forget his heavenly origins. Here, there is a noteworthy difference between the two Coptic recensions. James says:

> And I was not (ⲛⲉⲓϣⲟⲟⲡ . . . ⲁⲛ) of their kind, but I clothed myself (ⲁⲓϯ . . . ϩⲓⲱⲧ) with everything of theirs. Forgetfulness is in me, and the memory of those who are mine I do not have [. . .] is in me, and I am in their [. . .] their knowledge. (NH 28.20–27)[31]
>
> Now, I am (ⲁⲛⲟ[ⲕ]) not of this kind, but all the forgetfulness with which I have clothed [myself] is from them. [And] I do not remember. Those who are mine are ignorant within me, [and] I am [i]ncomplete in knowledge. (CT 15.7–13)

Johanna Brankaer and Hans-Gebhard Bethge write:

> The use of the imperfect in NHC V is striking. James refers to a situation of the past. Here one can think of his "coming to the world" (or of his birth): initially, he was not like the archons (the imperfect expresses a state), but then he clothed himself in all of their clothes (expressed by the perfect as historical narrative time), so in NHC V there is a contrast between James's original state and his current situation in the world.[32]

The same concept is there in the CT, but the tenses are not so differentiated. What the CT text clarifies is what, exactly, the difference is between James's original and

[29] This reiterates the earlier passage in 1 Apoc. Jas. that Jesus has descended to show the children of the One Who Is "what is theirs and what is not theirs (ⲛⲟⲩⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲟⲩ ⲁⲛ ⲛ[ⲉ])" (11.6–7). The addition of "those who are not mine" is then qualified, as James explains that even those produced from Achamoth alone ultimately stem from the Preexistent Father, because he created Achamoth (21.8–15).

[30] The CT version does not read ⲁⲕⲉⲓ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ or ⲉⲃⲟⲗ, but rather ⲁⲕⲉⲓ ⲉ, in the sense of "came to" rather than "descended" (15.2–5).

[31] For this translation, see Funk, "Significance of the Tchacos Codex," 522.

[32] Brankaer and Bethge, *Codex Tchacos*, 192.

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current state: It is forgetfulness.[33] Despite the emphasis throughout the gospel that James must leave the "weak flesh," its focus is on reaching a state of recollection rather than disembodiment.

Jesus's identity as a stranger from heaven, who has come into the contaminated world, is also applied to the believer in 1 Apoc. Jas.; however, the believer needs help to remember his/her origin. Only then can they return to their "roots" (22.22). Jesus's self-knowledge that authenticates his authority in John is reformulated in 1 Apoc. Jas. as the knowledge that James must acquire about himself.

B. The Heavenly and Earthly Persecutors

Identity is often formed in relation to the "other." In John and 1 Apoc. Jas. the "other" is represented by those who do not belong to the Father. The cosmic powers, named the "guard" and the "toll-collectors" (ⲧⲉⲗⲱⲛⲏⲥ), are described in terms of a lack of shared identity with Jesus and James. They are not from the highest Father; they are from Achamoth. They may be compared with the Johannine Jews, who are of the "world" (8:23), whose Father is not God but the devil (John 8:44). When the "Jews" ask Jesus for his identity, he answers by juxtaposing his divine heritage with their earthly one: "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world" (John 8:23). Comparably, in 1 Apoc. Jas., James is to tell the three toll-collectors that as a son of the Father, he is "a vessel that is more precious than Achamoth, the female who created you" (21.25–27).

It is not Judaism itself, or the Jewish people, that is the "other" in 1 Apoc. Jas. Jesus's and James's earthly persecutors are not called "Jews" or "high priests" as in John (e.g., 5:18; 7:1; 18:35), but rather "elders" (ⲛⲉ ⲛ[ⲉ]ⲡⲣⲉⲥ[ⲃⲩⲧⲉⲣⲟⲥ], 11.12–13) and "people" (ⲗⲁⲟⲥ, 18.1; 30.10–11), and also the "judges" (ⲛⲉ ⲕⲣⲓⲧⲏⲥ, 30.7–8) in the case of James.[34] The term Ἰουδαῖοι is never used, nor does the text appear to refer to a historical group of people.[35] The author(s) main interest lies in applying the *idea* of the Johannine "Jews" to cosmic beings, and steering clear of earthly titles such as "Jews" and "chief priests" directs the readers' attention to the cosmic realm. Overall, 1 Apoc. Jas. does appear to have a relatively negative attitude toward the "God who dwells in Jerusalem" (23.18–19), with James "the Just" rejecting both the people who condemn Jesus (perhaps to be identified with

[33] The consequences are also different: In the NH, James says that he can remember some things beyond the archontic realm. In CT, however, those who are his are ignorant of him.

[34] "Most of the judges realized that he had no sin and released him. And the others and all the people stood and said, 'Take him away from the earth! He is unworthy to live!'" (30.8–13).

[35] In John, the "Jews" are a rhetorical trope that represent the "world" (κόσμος), in opposition to Jesus's followers and heaven. For a detailed analysis of how these concepts are used throughout John, see Lars Kierspel, *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel: Parallelism, Function, and Context* (WUNT 2/220; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006). In Reinhartz's recent study, she argues that John's anti-Judaism is central to the Gospel's theology and rhetorical program, and John's Ἰουδαῖοι are not an ethnic or religious category but a rhetorical one (Adele Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John* [Lanham, MD: Fortress Academic, 2018]).

the Jewish authorities) and the "Just God" (18.16–25), and Jerusalem being cast as a negative place (11.23–12.3; 23.18–19). However, 1 Apoc. Jas. also understands certain Jewish Scriptures as divinely inspired and quotes Isa 11:2 as an authoritative text (26.6–27.2). It seems that although the God of the Jewish Scriptures is the "Just God" that James turns away from and is also identified as the ignorant ruler Addon (26.13), Jewish Scripture can refer to the Father and also be read christologically.

The "toll-collectors" in 1 Apoc. Jas. are connected with Valentinian mythology, as they have been produced by Achamoth alone and are ignorant of this fact, reflecting the common myth of the demiurge's origins.[36] However, the term τελώνης also stems from the canonical gospels, and Origen reads Luke and John together to demonstrate that "toll-collectors" are evil spirits who stop and examine souls in their ascent to heaven.[37] He writes that the Lukan τελώνης who come to be baptized in 3:12 can be subjected to a simple interpretation and a "loftier" and "mystical" interpretation. The latter reads:

> When we depart from the world and this life of ours has been transformed, some beings will be seated at the boundary of the world, as if they were exercising the office of toll-collectors (τελωνοῦσι), very carefully searching to find something in us that is theirs. It seems to me that "the ruler of the world" is like a toll-collector. Hence, the Scripture says of him, "The ruler of this world is coming, and he has no claim on me." (*Hom. Luc.* 23.5–6, quoting John 14:30)[38]

Origen creates this "loftier" reading by creatively linking the Lukan earthly "toll-collectors" with the Johannine cosmic "ruler of the world." This exegetical move is not dissimilar to what we find in 1 Apoc. Jas., in which the "toll-collectors" are cast as the cosmic enemies of Jesus, whom Jesus overpowers at his death—as he does the "ruler of the world" in John (16:11; cf. 12:31).

The persecution narrative in 1 Apoc. Jas. is enacted on two levels, with the challenge of the cosmic toll-collectors mirroring the earthly persecution by the

[36] Thomassen argues that the use of the toll-collector topos in 1 Apoc. Jas. indicates that it "was not composed by somebody who upheld a Valentinian type of theology" (Thomassen, "Valentinian Materials in *James*," 84). It also appears in the Nag Hammadi Apoc. Paul, in which the toll-collector converses with the soul regarding its sins (20.16), and later the toll-collector of the sixth heaven opens the gate for Paul to pass through (22.20). It is also found in Acts Thom. A 48 and (Pseudo-) Cyril, *Hom. Div.* 14: εὑρίσκει τε τελώνια φυλάττοντα τὴν ἄνοδον (PG 77.1073.42), and a comparable idea is in Athanasius's *Life of Antony* 65.

[37] τελώνης appears repeatedly throughout the Synoptic Gospels but is nowhere in John. This is another example of 1 Apoc. Jas.'s knowledge of Synoptic (probably Lukan) traditions.

[38] Origen's homilies on Luke are only extant in Jerome's Latin, with a few Greek catena fragments. The Greek parallel to the above quotation is largely the same but without the sentence: "It seems to me that 'the ruler of the world' is like a toll-collector." The link is implied but not stated. See *Homilien zu Lukas in der Übersetzung des Hieronymus und die griechischen Reste der Homilien und des Lukas-Kommentars* (ed. M. Rauer; vol. 9 of *Origenes Werke*; 2nd ed.; GCS 49 [35]; Berlin: Akademie, 1959) 144. The English translation of the Latin is taken from Origen, *Homilies on Luke* (trans. Joseph T. Lienhard; FC 94; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996) 99–100.

"elders," "people," and "judges." When Jesus tells James that "they" will seize him and "many" will oppose him because of his "powerful word (ⲡϣⲁϫⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲁⲛⲁϩⲧⲉ)" (19.24–20.1), he refers to both earthly arrest and death, as well as heavenly challenge from the guard and toll-collectors.

Death

A. Jesus's Death as Defeating Cosmic Powers

The dialogue between Jesus and James in 1 Apoc. Jas. begins during Jesus's ministry, is interrupted as Jesus undergoes his death, and continues a short time after his resurrection. The traditional passion story is presupposed, as Jesus foretells: "They will [seize me after] three days, and then [the crowd . . .] will [accuse] me and condemn me and [rebuke] me" (11.9–14). His death is not narrated. It is said that, through his death, "he prepared what was destined for him" (16.26–27) as well as the inheritance (ⲕⲗⲏⲣⲟⲥ) for the believers (15.23–26). Jesus then says that after his death he will "[appear] in order to convict the archons [and I will] reveal to them that there is one who cannot be detained (ⲁⲛⲁϩⲧⲉ). When he is detained (ⲁⲛⲁϩⲧⲉ), then he overpowers (ⲁⲛⲁϩⲧⲉ) them" (16.16–21).[39] James too must die. The text does not make it clear why, but Jesus instructs him not to fear his death and explains what will happen afterward.

The main purpose of Jesus's death, ascension, and return is to show the archons their ignorance and inferiority, and that he and his followers are stronger than them because God is their Father. This revelation overpowers the archons, paving the way for the disciple to follow Jesus to heaven.[40] James is concerned about the powers and hosts who are armed against him (NH 27.14–17), but Jesus explains that the powers are actually armed against Jesus himself (NH 27.18–24).[41] To understand Jesus's death as overcoming cosmic powers is not often stressed in Johannine scholarship; however, John 12:31–32 demonstrates that Jesus's death brings about the judgment of and victory over Satan.[42] Jesus in John is at odds with the "world" and his departure means that the "world" will be proven wrong and that "the ruler

[39] There is also a missionary aspect to Jesus's appearance, which will bring many to faith and knowledge (16.8–15).

[40] Karen King points out that 1 Apoc. Jas. does not attest to Christ's death as atoning sacrifice (Karen L. King, "Martyrdom and Its Discontents in the Tchacos Codex," in *Codex Judas Papers* [ed. DeConick], 24–25). The same point has been made for John, for which the purpose of Jesus's death is the culmination of the revelation that he is the Son of God. Bultmann writes that "the thought of Jesus' death as an atonement for sin has no place in John" (Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* [trans. Kendrick Grobel; 2 vols.; London: SCM, 1958] 2:54). Although he concedes that such understanding can be read into John (1:29; 3:16; 17:9, etc.), it is a foreign element and does not cohere with the soteriology of the majority of the gospel. Also, M. C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996).

[41] These passages are lost in CT due to the fragmentary state of p. 14.

[42] Judith L. Kovacs, "'Now Shall the Ruler of This World Be Driven Out': Jesus' Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12:20–36," *JBL* 114 (1995) 227–47.

of this world has been condemned" (16:11). As we saw for Origen, the ruler of the world is akin to the toll-collectors, and, for 1 Apoc. Jas., Jesus's death means that they will be overpowered. Furthermore, the motif of the cosmic powers being armed first against Jesus and then against his disciples is reminiscent of John 15:18–19: "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you." The Johannine "world" and the "ruler of the world" are comparable to the cosmic powers and hosts in 1 Apoc. Jas. who are armed, first against Jesus, but then against James because he belongs to the Father, and who are defeated or overpowered by Jesus's death.

B. Suffering and Not Suffering

When Jesus returns after the crucifixion, he reveals himself as: "I am the one who preexists in myself" (18.6–8).[43] He tells James: "I have not suffered anything, nor did I die, and these people did me no harm. Rather, this was laid upon a figure (ⲧⲩⲡⲟⲥ) of the archons, for whom <it was fitting> to be prepared. It was the archons who prepared it, then it finished" (18.8–16).[44] The "figure" (or "type") of the archons refers to Jesus's material body as opposed to his preexistent "self." The opening of this quotation was once seen as indicating a "docetic" christology that denies that Jesus suffered and died.[45] Yet, elsewhere 1 Apoc. Jas. suggests that Jesus *did* suffer: James hears of Jesus's sufferings (ϩ̄ⲓⲥⲉ [16,28]; ⲙ̄ⲕⲟⲟϩ [NH 30.14]) and is grieved. Jesus tells James that he must suffer (NH 32.18; 33.2–3), presumably as he did himself.[46] Certainly, there is no denial that Jesus's body or "figure" suffered and died. The text's claim is that his preexistent "self" did not.

The playing down of Jesus's suffering pushes his death in a more Johannine direction, as opposed to what we find in the synoptic passion narratives. John highlights Jesus's autonomy, exaltation, and glorification.[47] His suffering is implied, as he is nailed to a cross and dies, but this is not stressed. Rather, at his death he professes "it is finished" and actively lowers his head and "gave up his spirit"

[43] The NH version reads: "I am he who was within me" (31.17–18).

[44] The NH version reads: "Never have I suffered in any way, nor have I been distressed. And these people have done me no harm. But this existed [as] a type of the archons, and it deserved to be [destroyed] through them" (31.18–26). The reconstruction of "it was fitting" in CT matches "it deserved" in NH.

[45] For example, Veilleux, *Première apocalypse de Jacques*, 84. John, likewise, has been seen as docetic (see Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 278–88, with references to the literature). Reading this passage in this way suggests that Jesus's resurrected "self" does not have a body, which is not the case, as will be discussed later.

[46] Both corresponding references in CT do not use the word "sufferings," but "these things" (19.11–12; 19.24). Similarly, where Jesus reappears to James, in CT, James says, "I heard what you endured" (17.24), whereas in NH, James says, "I heard of your sufferings (ⲙ̄ⲕⲟⲟϩ)" (31.6–7). CT may downplay Jesus's suffering, but this would require a longer study.

[47] de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives*.

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(19:30). In the reworking of the Gethsemane story, he willingly takes up his cross without fear (12:27; cf. 10:18). 1 Apoc. Jas. does not narrate the crucifixion but it appears to go further than John in portraying death with a lack of suffering. A dichotomy is created between Jesus's flesh that suffered, which belonged to the archons, and Jesus's "self" that came from the Father.

This dichotomy is also applied to the disciple. James is told that the "weak flesh will get what is assigned to it" (19.13–14), and he should not be distressed about it. Death is not James's end but the beginning of his journey to the Father. James's death scene in 1 Apoc. Jas. also depicts a self-governing death, in which he cries, "My Father [in] heaven, forgive them, for they do (not) know what they do" (30.24–26). Brankaer and Bethge write: "Comparable to Jesus in John 18:1–8, James appears sovereign and dignified in his martyrdom. Like Jesus, James is fundamentally untouchable, and he himself determines events."[48] We have already seen that James spoke about clothing himself in what belongs to the archons and that, like Jesus, he existed in a previous state. The distinction between the weak flesh and the self can exist because James preexisted in the Preexistent Father. It is only by overcoming the "bond of the flesh" that James can "reach the One-Who-Is" (13.22–24).

The absence of Jesus's suffering in 1 Apoc. Jas. is linked to the martyr experience. As Haxby writes:

> Jesus moves logically from articulating his own freedom from suffering to arguing that James and other martyrs likewise do not have anything to fear from torture and execution. So, when Jesus says, "I did not suffer at all, and I did not die," he is not articulating something that is peculiar to himself as the son of God. Rather, all people share this characteristic structure of the self. The flesh and the body may suffer and die, but the essential aspect of the human survives. . . . The text explains that the martyr's flesh may suffer, but the martyr in his or her essential aspect will not.[49]

The division of the unsuffering true "self" and the suffering body is not something peculiar to 1 Apoc. Jas., or to texts that show a Valentinian or "gnostic" influence, but it is a relatively common trope in martyrdom literature.[50] Candida Moss notes that 1 Apoc. Jas. and martyrdom literature share a "common rhetorical vocabulary and martyrological grammar"; yet, she argues that 1 Apoc. Jas. places no value on suffering and so is ideologically opposed to other martyrdom literature.[51] In actuality, a number of martyrdom narratives depict suffering during martyrdom as deviating from other suffering due to the martyr already participating in the divine.

[48] Brankaer and Bethge, *Codex Tchacos*, 253.

[49] Haxby, "First Apocalypse of James," 54–55.

[50] The term "martyrdom" here does not necessitate any particular understanding of Christ's death or the deaths of his followers. For martyrdom and the Tchacos Codex, see King, "Marytrdom and Its Discontents," 24–25.

[51] Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (ABRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012) 160.

Thus, as we see in John and 1 Apoc. Jas., the agony foisted upon the body through crucifixion, stoning, or other forms of torture is upstaged by the martyr's immunity to earthly concerns which results in a lack of suffering in the self.

In the Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas, suffering in martyrdom is joyful (17.1), as opposed to suffering through, say, childbirth. While the pregnant slave girl Felicitas undergoes a premature labour, she claims that her experience at death will be different: "Now alone I suffer what I am suffering, but then there will be another inside me, who will suffer for me, because I am going to suffer for him" (15.5–6).[52] She implies that the pain of untimely childbirth and the pain she will feel in the arena are incomparable. At her death, she will suffer for Christ, and Christ will be within her and suffer for her. Her suffering is shared with Christ, making it divine. Another case is Blandina, a martyr who, while undergoing torture, is described as insensible to pain because of her communion with Christ (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.1.18, 55).[53] Along with her, Sanctus endures extensive torture until red-hot bronze plates are applied to the tenderest parts of his body (1.21), but we read that there is "nothing painful where we find Christ's glory" (1.23). The example most akin to 1 Apoc. Jas. is found in the Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius, in which martyrdom and resurrection/ascension happen simultaneously. In a vision, the renowned martyr Cyprian tells the martyr Flavian: "It is another flesh (*alia caro*) that suffers when the soul is in heaven. The body does not feel this at all when the mind is entirely absorbed in God."[54]

The focus of the narrative in 1 Apoc. Jas. is different to most other martyrdom literature in that it is not the endurance of bodily suffering that is addressed but the knowledge that bodily suffering is of no real importance.[55] James must become free from "the bond that is in the flesh" in order to reach the Preexistent Father. But the lack of suffering at death is not so different. The interest in the text is not the real, human experience of pain, suffering, and death but what happens in the cosmic sphere where the challenge is to remember one's identity when met by the powers. Although endurance and suffering in death is included, it is a subplot to the conflict with the heavenly toll-collectors.

The recasting of the earthly drama into the heavenly sphere is another point of commonality between 1 Apoc. Jas. and other martyrdom literature. Judith Perkins argues that Christian martyrdom narratives

[52] The Latin text and translation is taken from Thomas J. Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 100–135.

[53] The Letter of the Church of Lyons and Vienne is taken from Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.1.1–65.

[54] The Martyrdom of Saints Montanus and Lucius 21.4; Musurillo, 234–35.

[55] In many ways, 1 Apoc. Jas. is more akin to Epicurus and the Stoic school in their teaching of self-mastery. Epictetus describes "a 'self' unaffected by pain or suffering. Only virtue and vice mattered; pain belonged to that large category of things outside a person's control and was therefore an indifferent" (Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* [London: Routledge, 1995] 80).

> relocate the conflict outside the natural world. Those who challenge Christians are depicted as either demons, devils, or their dupes. . . . By such labeling, the Christian texts banish their enemies beyond the natural world itself, and display the scope of the drama martyrs see themselves enacting in their theater of martyrdom. They look for power and vindication, not in this world, but in the transcendent world to come.[56]

In the Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas, a dream allows Perpetua to realize "that it was not with the wild animals that I would fight but with the devil" (10.14). Her visions "represent a cosmic conflict with Satan resulting in martyrdom . . . martyrdom is interpreted as the means by which the devil is defeated."[57] The day of execution is called the "day of their victory," and they enter the arena "as if they were going to heaven" (18.1). In 1 Apoc. Jas., it is James's autonomous death that will enable his victory over the archons and return to his root in the Preexistent Father.

Ascension

A. Ascension, Return and the Way

After Jesus's "figure" dies in 1 Apoc. Jas., he ascends through the archons and then returns to meet James and tell him about it. This appearance of Jesus appears to be the final one. There is no indication that Jesus will come again, and a future parousia expectation may be implicitly negated by Jesus's words "the Son of Man has come and has revealed" (25.26–27). The ascension-return motif in 1 Apoc. Jas. is distinctly Johannine. The Johannine Jesus is the Son of Man who descends from heaven (3:13) and reascends to "where he was before" (6:62) through being "lifted up" (3:13–14; 8:28–29). Yet, he has not fully ascended through being lifted up on the cross—as we will see, it can be read that he continues to ascend during his conversation with Mary Magdalene (20:17). His ascension has consequences not only for himself as manifesting his glory, but for all people: "When I am lifted up from the earth," he says, "I will draw all people to myself" (12:32).[58] Furthermore, he promises to return to his disciples and take them to heaven: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also" (14:2–3).

In both texts, Jesus prepares access to the Father through his ascension to God, and this allows his disciples access to follow him to heaven.[59] Reimund Bieringer reaches this conclusion for John, although by a different means, writing:

[56] Ibid., 119–20.

[57] Paul Middleton, "Overcoming the Devil in the Acts of the Martyrs," in *Evil in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Chris Keith and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; WUNT 2/417; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016) 357–74, at 360.

[58] John 12:33 reads, "He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die."

[59] In John, Jesus will prepare (ⲥⲱⲧⲉ) a "place" (ⲙⲁ), whereas in 1 Apoc. Jas., he will prepare

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> by ascending to God, Jesus will prepare the access to the Father. . . . This is even more forcefully said in 20:17f when John states that through Jesus' ascension his Father will become the Father of the disciples and his God will become the God of the disciples. Jesus' ascension or pilgrimage to the Father will prepare the way for the ascension or pilgrimage of the disciples.[60]

It is to John 20:17 that we now turn—a statement that might have had a big influence on the ideas within 1 Apoc. Jas.

B. The Tangible Body of the Returned Jesus

In both the Johannine farewell discourse and 1 Apoc. Jas., Jesus's dialogue partners are interested in Jesus's promise to return to his disciples after his death and take them to heaven so that they can be with him. They want to know *how* this will happen. The question of Jesus's return is raised by Judas in John: "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world?" (14:22). And James in 1 Apoc. Jas. says: "Rabbi, how will you appear to me after you are condemned and the heritage is prepared and you have attained to the One Who Is?" (16.2–7).[61] The Johannine Jesus answers by saying that he and his Father will make their home with those who love them (14:23). In 1 Apoc. Jas., Jesus replies that he will appear "in this place" to bring unbelievers to belief and to show the archons that he cannot be overcome (16.7–21). The reappearance of Jesus in 1 Apoc. Jas. promises to be more inclusive than that of John, although the text only narrates his appearance to James.

When the risen Jesus meets James, he appears to him in his material body: Unlike other resurrection narratives, he is not "in another form" (e.g., Mark 16:12; cf. Ap. John; Wis. Jes. Chr.) but is a tangible, physical being. And yet he is the "one who preexists in myself." This may stem from a reading of the ascension and return of Jesus of John 20.

In John 20:17, Mary Magdalene has met Jesus in the garden after he has come out of the tomb, and he tells her: "Do not touch (ἅπτου) me because I have not yet ascended (ἀναβέβηκα) to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending (ἀναβαίνω) to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."[62]

(cвтє) the "inheritance" (κληρος). The two concepts largely correspond, as the inheritance is the hoped-for destiny or destination after death. This is the way that Ignatius uses the word κλῆρος (Ign. *Trall.* 12.3; Ign. *Rom.* 1.2).

[60] Reimund Bieringer, "'I Am Ascending to My Father and Your Father, to My God and Your God' (John 20:17): Resurrection and Ascension in the Gospel of John," in *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (ed. Helmut Koester and Reimund Bieringer; WUNT 1/222; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 209–35, at 232.

[61] Jesus's return can and has been read in two ways: as a proximate postresurrection appearance and as the more-distant Parousia (Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 437–39). 1 Apoc. Jas. narrates only a postresurrection appearance adjacent to the crucifixion and is not interested in a future coming of Christ.

[62] John 20:17 has no parallel in the Synoptics or in the tradition and so is likely the work of the evangelist. See Bieringer, "Resurrection and Ascension," 218–20. Cf. Ashton: "In 20:17 there is no reference to the Son of Man and the context indicates the use of an old ascension tradition"

The interpretation of the term ἅπτου has been hotly contested, with many modern interpreters preferring the translation "hold on to" or "cling to," and it is not possible to know for sure what the author of the Fourth Gospel had in mind. However, the majority of ancient commentators understood the encounter between Mary and Jesus to be about physical touch, and I doubt that 1 Apoc. Jas. would be an exception.[63]

Mary is told not to touch Jesus, *because* (γάρ) he has not yet ascended. The γάρ, likewise, has caused numerous problems for interpreters. However, the "vast majority" opinion is that the γάρ is a "marker of cause or reason."[64] The interpretative problem comes in the next episode, when Thomas is invited to touch Jesus. Bieringer asks: "Does this suggest implicitly that after having ascended to the Father Jesus may well be touched? . . . If in 20:27 Thomas is invited to touch, does this demonstrate that Jesus has in the meantime actually ascended and is now in a state in which he can be touched?"[65] For the majority of interpreters the answer is no, but for 1 Apoc. Jas. the answer is yes. In 1 Apoc. Jas., Jesus's return as a physical, tangible being is demonstrated by his embrace with James—an embrace that is mentioned twice. First, "And the Lord appeared to him. And he stopped (his) prayer, hugged him (and) kissed him" (NH 31.2–5).[66] Second, "Since you are a just one of God, you have embraced me and kissed me" (NH 32.6–8).[67] James the Just was previously a servant of the Just God (CT 18.18), but now he has stopped praying to this God, and has embraced Jesus. James and Jesus then sit down together on a rock (19.6–10). Understandably, Hartenstein sees this detail as puzzling,[68] but it serves to emphasize the physicality of the resurrected Jesus.[69]

(Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 248 n. 18). Also, according to Mohri, 20:17 preserves an ancient tradition that is kept because it is close to John's thinking (Erika Mohri, *Maria Magdalena. Frauenbilder in Evangelientexten des 1. bis 3. Jahrhunderts* [Marburger theologische Studien 63; Marburg: Elwert, 2000] 140).

[63] The majority of patristic writers that engage with this verse assume touch to be physical; see e.g., Tertullian, *Prax.,* 25.8; Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Dialogue*, 3.12; Ephrem, *Commentary on Diatessaron* 21.26; Epiphanius, *Pan.*, 26.15.5. Lehtipuu writes: "No patristic commentator to my knowledge tries to solve the problem [of John 20:17] by interpreting the verb ἅπτομαι as something else than referring to touching" (Outi Lehtipuu, "'I have not yet ascended to the Father': On Resurrection, Bodies, and Resurrection Bodies," in *"Noli me tangere" in Interdisciplinary Perspective: Textual, Iconographic and Contemporary Interpretations* [ed. Reimund Bieringer, Barbara Baert, and Karlijn Demasure; BETL 283; Leuven: Peeters, 2016], 43–59, at 47).

[64] On the multiple scholarly explanations of the syntax of 20:17 and the use of the word "touch," see Bieringer, "Resurrection and Ascension in the Gospel of John."

[65] Ibid., 210.

[66] CT 17.19–22: "In the midst of this prayer Jesus appeared to him. And he stopped his prayer (and) began to take him (into his arms)." The language of "Lord" in NH is closer to John 20.

[67] CT 19.1–2: "As for me, he embraced me and kissed me." Luttikhuizen sees these details as proof of Jesus's bodily resurrection and the kiss as a ritual kiss (Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, "Vor- und nachösterliche Herrenworte in der 1. Offenbarung des Jakobus, NHC, V,3," in *Der Gottesspruch in der koptischen Literatur. Hans-Martin Schenke zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. W. Beltz; Halle: Druckerei der Martin-Luther-Universität, 1994] 93–95).

[68] Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 207.

[69] Brankaer and Bethge, *Codex Tchacos*, 209.

An interpretation that has Jesus ascending to the Father after appearing to Mary and returning before appearing to the male disciples is counter to the majority Christian reading. Yet, it is not unique. Again, we see 1 Apoc. Jas. making similar interpretative moves to Origen, who offers several different understandings of Jesus's instruction to Mary not to touch him.[70] In the *Dialogue with Heraclides*, however, he understands Jesus to have ascended after meeting Mary Magdalene and returned from the Father before appearing to the male disciples.

> Witness the text of the Gospel: the Lord Jesus rose from the dead; Mary met him and he said to her: "Do not touch me." For he wanted those who touched him to touch him in his entirety so that, touching him in his entirety, they would receive the benefit of his body in their body, the benefit of his soul in their soul, the benefit of his spirit in their spirit. "For I have not yet ascended to the Father." He ascends to the Father and then comes to his disciples. (8.7–15)[71]

The details of Origen's and 1 Apoc. Jas.'s accounts of Jesus's ascension and tangible reappearance might differ, but both texts show that it is possible to read John 20 in this way.

From Martyrdom to Monasticism: Overcoming Hostile Forces

In John, Jesus promised to come again and take his followers to heaven (14:3), and in 1 Apoc. Jas., Jesus's return has already happened, suggesting that the disciple can expect immediate ascension into heaven upon death. Jesus tells James that "when you are arrested, you will face these things" (19.24–25) and implies that upon leaving the body, he will attain to the Father (13.22–24). This idea is characteristic of martyrdom literature, in which resurrection is understood as "direct ascent to heaven at the moment of death."[72]

To read John 19–20 through 1 Apoc. Jas., fleshly suffering is downplayed and immediate salvation is proposed, and this would have been especially appealing to readers faced with martyrdom. In order to make a potentially agonizing death palatable, there had to be the offer of an immediate reward, if not also immunity to pain. Although persecution of Christians in the second and third centuries was local and sporadic, to be a Christian entailed a willingness to die for the cause, and this may have been the situation that inspired this reading of John.

However, 1 Apoc. Jas. continued to be inscribed after Christian persecution ended, with relative levels of popularity, suggesting that the text held meaning over and above immediate salvation in the face of martyrdom. Christians in late antiquity

[70] In other works, Origen gives different explanations for the words "Do not touch me." See Joseph Crehan, "The Dialektos of Origen and John 20:17," *JTS* 11 (1950) 368–73.

[71] *Entretien d'Origène avec Héraclide et les évêques ses collègues sur le Père, le Fils, et l'âme* (ed. and trans. Jean Scherer; SC 67; Paris: Cerf, 1960) 72.

[72] Outi Lehtipuu, *Debates over the Resurrection of the Dead* (OECS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 168.

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continued to see the embodied condition as suffering and had to confront the ongoing challenge of demonic powers seeking to deceive them from the righteous path. This is especially prevalent in monastic literature,[73] and recent scholarship has shown how the Nag Hammadi codices (and Codex Tchacos) were likely read and preserved in Egyptian monasteries.[74] The message that we find in 1 Apoc. Jas. is one of endurance, overcoming hostile forces, and salvation. The focus on divine identity and cosmic conflict, as opposed to Christian identity and torture of the flesh, may have held more influence in the fourth century of the Coptic codices when Christian bodies no longer faced Roman officials but Christian souls faced the powers of the devil. The "toll-collectors" were as much a part of the fourth-century monastic world as they were the second- or third-century martyr's world.

Another way to understand the use of John in 1 Apoc. Jas. is to look to Origen. In this paper, I have pointed to two clear examples of where their interpretations of John correspond: 1) the toll-collectors, likened to the Johannine "ruler of the world," that sit at the edge of heaven; and 2) the narrative that has Jesus ascending to his Father following his death and returning in the flesh to the male disciples. These are both relatively unusual interpretations of sections of the Fourth Gospel. It is impossible to state the nature of these connections—was 1 Apoc. Jas. influenced by a form of Origenism, vice versa, or neither?—and answering this was far from the purpose of this paper.[75] It is certainly possible that ancient readers of 1 Apoc. Jas. would have associated these ideas, among others, with Origenism and its interpretation of John.[76] Thus, the ongoing interest in Origenism in late antiquity may be another reason for the relatively successful shelf life of 1 Apoc. Jas.

Conclusion

The First Apocalypse of James uses certain christological themes found in John and makes them pertinent for human salvation. The relationship between the two texts reveals a mode of early Christian reception, common to gospel literature, that

[73] See, e.g., David Brakke, *Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons* (Cistercian Studies Series 229; Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 2009) 1–40.

[74] Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity 97; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

[75] Origenist or anti-Origenist redaction of Nag Hammadi literature is an avenue worth researching, as shown by Geoffrey Smith, "Anti-Origenist Redaction in the Fragments of the *Gospel of Truth* (NHC XII,2): Theological Controversy and the Transmission of Early Christian Literature," *HTR* 110 (2017) 46–74. However, the two examples mentioned above at which 1 Apoc. Jas. and Origen provide similar readings of John are consistent in both Coptic recensions of 1 Apoc. Jas. and therefore do not point to a clear case of Origenist redaction.

[76] Other connections with Origenism might be the ontological connection between Christ and humanity, as Origen saw the Word as one of the preexistent rational souls (e.g., *Princ.* 2.9.6); forgetfulness of God in laziness (*Princ.* 1.4.1); a spiritual interpretation of the parousia as the manifestation of Jesus's divinity to all people that will result in recognition of their true character; reabsorption into God; and Christ returning in the body, as the soul needs a body in material places (*Cels.* 7.32).

does not rely on verbal reminiscences, quotations, or allusions to selected verses of earlier texts. The purpose of this paper was to question how 1 Apoc. Jas. used the motifs of identity, death, and ascension, as derived from the Fourth Gospel, and applied them to James as a model of the Christian disciple. I suggested that the author(s) of the later gospel wanted to know: If Jesus is the "way" to the Father, as he himself tells us in John, then what does this "way" entail? What can disciples expect to encounter on their way, and how can they reach salvation?

The Johannine Jesus is depicted as the Son of the Father, who is contrasted with the earth and its occupants. Jesus's divine parentage in 1 Apoc. Jas. is applied to James, who is another son of the Father, as opposed to the cosmic toll-collectors and guard who are produced only from the female Achamoth. The toll-collectors and guard are analogous to both the Johannine "Jews" and the "ruler of the world," who are ignorant of or opposed to God. Jesus's death in John overpowers the "ruler of the world," and in 1 Apoc. Jas. it overpowers the cosmic archons. In both texts, Jesus's suffering at death is deemphasized and his autonomy stressed. 1 Apoc. Jas. takes this idea significantly further than its predecessor, with Jesus claiming that he did not suffer or die. The claim is that Jesus's death is the separation of his flesh or "figure" and the preexistent "self." At this point, 1 Apoc. Jas. fits well with other martyrdom literature, which frequently divorces the unsuffering "self," which participates in the divine, and the suffering flesh. This is then applied to the disciple: James should not fear his stoning. The earthly drama of the death is recast into the heavens, and the disciple's adversary becomes the devil (or the "toll-collectors") rather than his earthly executors. After Jesus's death, he ascends through the archons and reveals to them that the children of Achamoth cannot overpower children of the Father. He then returns in the flesh to explain to James his own upcoming ascension. Jesus tells James that he will meet a guard and toll-collectors and must declare to them his divine identity. This, then, is the way. The ascension and return of Jesus is most likely based on a reading of John 20, in which Jesus will not allow Mary to touch him before ascending to "my Father and your Father," and then returns and welcomes touch from Thomas.

The fact that three recensions of 1 Apoc. Jas. exist today, as well as being partially embedded in Irenaeus's work, suggests that the work was of considerable interest over several centuries. In Irenaeus's time, the ideas found within 1 Apoc. Jas. may have been useful for the instructions regarding martyrdom. However, the two fourth-century Coptic versions and the later Greek manuscript demonstrate that interest in the text continued centuries after persecution ended. Going into late antiquity, the Johannine motifs of identity, death, and ascension in 1 Apoc. Jas. that focus on overcoming cosmic evil did not cease to gain the attention of select Christian audiences.