

KIRKUS REVIEWS

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KIRKUS REVIEWS
 Date of Issue: October 15, 1996

Eisenman, Robert
**JAMES, THE BROTHER
 OF JESUS: *The Key to
 Unlocking the Secrets of
 Early Christianity and the
 Dead Sea Scrolls***
 Viking (992 pp.)
 \$39.95
 Jan. 1997
 ISBN: 0-670-86932-5

Gripping but partisan conjectures from Dead Sea Scrolls scholar Eisenman (Middle East Religions/ California State Univ.), arguing that St. James is the missing link between Judaism and a supposed pre-Pauline Christianity.

Although James is called the brother of Jesus and surnamed "the Just" (or "the Righteous"), he has a relatively minor role in the New Testament. For Eisenman, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls opens up the background of events preceding the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans, revealing a world of highly nationalistic and apocalyptic Jewish sects that were bitterly opposed to Gentile influence and in which James was prominent. Eisenman argues that Christianity was originally one of these groups, closely linked with the Essenes. James was, Eisenman suggests, a leader of the Jerusalem Christians and represented the authentic succession to Jesus, a continuity that was obliterated by the Roman destruction of the city in 72 A.D. Eisenman hypothesizes an aboriginal Christianity marked by scrupulous adherence to the Torah and standing in complete contrast to St. Paul's universalism, grace, and freedom from Jewish law. In this scenario, Paul is James's bitter antagonist. It was Paul who transformed a zealot movement into a Hellenistic mystery religion acceptable to the Roman imperium. That Christianity, albeit "Pauline," was tailored to first-century Roman tastes will strike many readers as a paradox. Eisenman reaches his conclusions by exploring literary parallels and lacunae in the New Testament, the Scrolls, and contemporary literature, a methodology colored by the author's historical approach to Jesus and the New Testament, which denies the supernatural and can shed a negative light on Christianity and its founders.

Eisenman's historical reconstruction makes for fascinating reading, but it never takes us beyond the realm of the merely plausible.