

A strange sign in the Temple and its possible connection to the prosecution of James the brother of Yeshua

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In the records of the first century historian Josephus is the account of several strange miraculous signs that occurred in and around the Temple in Jerusalem in the years immediately preceding the city's fall to the Romans in 70 A.D. All but one of these ominous signs are easy to interpret in light of what happened after them. The one that is difficult to interpret took place in the Temple itself and is only briefly mentioned and quite bizarre. It appears to be so far from reality that most scholars have concluded that all the signs were mere fables. I have approached this issue the other way around. Because the others signs are quite compelling, I can't help but believe there must be something of significance to this strange sign as well.

The picture of it was in the back of my mind for some time before it finally hit me. When I considered the identity of those who witnessed the sign with their own eyes, a new possibility emerged. All of the eye witnesses to this sign, as well as many of their associates, were very familiar with an unjust trial that took place a mere four years earlier. A number of them were undoubtedly a part of it. The significance of the person involved to whom this injustice was done cannot be overstated. It was none other than James, Yeshua's brother. I now believe this particular sign was addressed specifically to those priests who had innocent blood on their hands. The most notable of them was Ananus. Ananus was High Priest and head of the Sanhedrin that ordered the death of James. He was deposed of his office as High Priest because he had James' blood on his hands, but four years later, at the time this particular sign appeared in the temple, he was commander of the revolutionary forces in Jerusalem. There is no question but what Ananus would have been tight with the sitting High Priest and been very close to all the happenings in the Temple at that time. He most certainly would have heard about this sign immediately from first hand witnesses, but he also might well have been in the Temple to witness it for himself. If I am correct about this sign, it certainly would have been poetic justice if Ananus had witnessed it with his own eyes.

It is safe to assume there were a number of issues that James was interrogated about at his trial four years earlier. But there is one issue that most certainly would have come up, and anyone familiar with the facts could easily imagine how the discussion of this issue could have naturally played out. It's the issue of James' relationship to Yeshua.

Below is offered a version of how I think the line of questions and answers concerning James' physical relationship to Yeshua might well have played out. It is also safe to assume that the subjects of Paul, and the Gentile Trophimus who defiled the Temple a few years earlier, would also have been brought up. I have written a separate article concerning Trophimus entitled: "**Why Didn't James Come to Paul's Rescue?**" It can be accessed at http://www.judaismvschristianity.com/trophimus_incident.htm .

In the following theoretical reenactment, I have included my idea of how these issues of Paul and Trophimus might have been discussed at James' trial as well.

The Trial

High Priest Ananus: *“James, you have been brought before the Sanhedrin on charges of sedition and being the leader of a Messianic movement that believes your brother Yeshua is Israel’s Messiah. Is it true that you are their leader and that you are Yeshua’s brother?”*

James: *“Yeshua is indeed my older brother, and I have become a leader to those who know him as Israel’s Messiah. I am asked often what it was like to have grown up with Yeshua, and many have come to trust me to tell the truth about him.”*

Ananus: *“As you well know, the Sanhedrin does not believe Yeshua, who is dead, could possibly be Israel’s Messiah. We have heard that you and your followers believe the ridiculous story that he was raised from the dead and is alive. But we have never seen him and so our position remains. You are also aware that these Messianics who follow your lead have been a burdensome problem for us. We have heard that they blame the Sanhedrin for your brother’s death and therefore have no respect for our rulings or authority any longer. Furthermore, this Messianic movement has gone to the Gentiles where they are now calling themselves Christians ...and everyone in Jerusalem still vividly remembers the day several years ago when one of them, Trophimus the Ephesian, thought the Law of Moses didn’t apply to him and he defiled the Temple of God and entered the court of Israel where no uncircumcised Gentile is permitted. To this day there remains a dark cloud over Jerusalem because of that desecration. It was a Messianic associate of yours who was teaching that Moses had been annulled. We all remember Paul, who is now being harbored by the Romans and is out of our reach. He taught that your brother’s crucifixion was a final sacrifice that annulled the Law. Consequently, Trophimus, actually came to believe he had some new right to enter the Temple. I know it was Paul who was responsible for Trophimus’ thinking because I was one of those who interrogated him! Paul’s doctrine was his first and only defense. He said that it was Paul who had told them that Yeshua had broken down the wall of division, and Gentiles were no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the Jews and members of the household of God.¹ We also heard that it was you James who had sent that blasphemer Paul to the Temple at the time Trophimus defiled it! Tell us James, what part did you have in this? Do you accept any responsibility for the desecration of the Temple of God seeing that you and Paul were also close?”*

James: *“I was aware of the rumors concerning Paul and what he had been teaching the Gentiles and was very disturbed by it. When Paul came to Jerusalem, the first thing I did was confront him about the rumors and I let him know in no uncertain terms that they had better not be true.² At that time, because he was a fellow believer in Yeshua, I wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. The very reason I sent him to the Temple was to offer him an opportunity to prove to all that the rumors were only rumors and he still abided by the Law of Moses. I ordered him to provide the animals of sacrifice for four*

¹ See Ephesians 2:14-19

² See Acts 21:18-36

Nazirites who had taken a vow. I thought that if he truly believed the Law of Moses had been annulled by my brother's sacrifice, he would never involve himself with burnt offerings and the ongoing sacrificial rites of the Temple. The fact that Paul went ahead and provided the animals for sacrifice had convinced me, at least for a short time, that the rumors were not true. When we heard about Trophimus defiling the Temple and the subsequent defense he had given you, we were shocked. It was then that we realized the rumors were true and Paul had deceived us. I was given a copy of Paul's letter to the Ephesian Gentiles and was absolutely appalled by what I read. It's no wonder Trophimus thought he had the right to go into the Temple. Paul had deceived me. He was a coward for not telling me the truth about what he had been teaching. The very fact that he is now safe in Rome with his fellow Roman citizens openly displays the depths of his cowardice. After boasting that he was willing to come to Jerusalem and die for what he believed,³ when Festus offered Paul the opportunity to come here and defend himself, he cowered and chose rather to make his appeal to Caesar Nero of all people!⁴ You know this to be true because it was this very body who had petitioned Festus to bring Paul here for trial. To this day, the thought of Paul and what he has done feels like a knife in my back. From the moment I knew that the rumors about Paul were true I have had nothing to do with him. And frankly, I was not unsympathetic to the cause of those who took an oath and refused to eat until they saw Paul dead.⁵ As you know, I have always been zealous for the Law and the sanctity of the Holy Temple, and I have always taught the Messianics likewise."

Ananus: "These Messianics are nevertheless becoming an ever-increasing problem. So James, tell us more about your brother Yeshua. What is the deal with him? We hear you have referred to him as Adoni ...your Master! Isn't it a bit unusual for someone to refer to his brother that way? What's so great about him? You both came from the same parents. Why aren't you as special? Don't you feel any jealousy that a normal brother might feel in a situation like yours?"

James: "Yeshua and I do not have the same parents. We are half brothers."

Ananus: "Is that right? So, do you and Yeshua have a common father? If so, what is his name?"

James: "Yeshua and I do not have the same father. We have the same mother. Yeshua was born before our mother came to be with my father Joseph."

Ananus: "So who was Yeshua's father, and when did he die so that your mother could marry your father, Joseph?"

James: "Our mother was pregnant with my brother when she married my father Joseph."

³ See Acts 21:13

⁴ See Acts 25:9-12

⁵ See Acts 23:12-15

Ananus: *“It would appear the truth you are trying so hard to avoid revealing is that your common mother was a harlot! Is that right James?”*

The pain those awful words brought to James’ heart cut like a knife ...so much worse than the knife he felt in his back over Paul. This pain went right to his very soul. You see, there had been a time when he wondered about his mother himself. He remembered it well and hated himself for ever having questioned her honor. As his life was passing before his eyes, he remembered the day when as a young boy he was sitting on the hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee and his mother sat down next to him and asked him what was troubling him. It was like she could see right through him ...almost as if she already knew what was on his mind. He remembered telling her he had heard people say some really bad things about her and how he had figured out that the math didn’t work when it came to when his older brother was born, and when she and his father had been married. He told her he knew there was something different about Yeshua, but wasn’t sure just what it was. He remembered summoning the courage to ask her outright if it was because his father Joseph wasn’t really Yeshua’s father. He could still see the pain in her eyes from hearing him ask the question. At the time, he thought the painful look was born of guilt. But he had long since come to know differently. The pain in her eyes was for him and what she knew he was going to have to bear. He could hear her tender voice still echoing in his memory:

“James. I knew this day would come and you would ask me that question.”

She paused, took a deep breath and said:

“My son, I love you more than life itself. I hope you know that. What I am about to tell you is going to be very hard for you to believe, and though I know you may not believe me, it’s time for you to know the truth about your brother.”

She told him about being visited by the angel Gabriel and what he had told her about the child that would be conceived in her womb. He shamefully remembered having thought to himself: *“The same angel who visited the great prophet Daniel visited my mother?! Yeah right.”* She told him everything ...about how she and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem for the census, about staying in the stable the night his brother was born, about what the shepherds had seen and heard ...everything.

He remembered how later he had confided in his Rabbi what his mother had told him, and how his Rabbi had as nicely as he could, told him that sometimes people make up stories to hide dark secrets of the past. He remembered when his brother had begun his ministry and how so many people followed him. He remembered how all the while he thought in the back of his mind that his brother couldn’t be for real because he was an illegitimate product of fornication. He remembered how hard it was for so long, to look his mother in the eye without feeling shame for her. He remembered how when Yeshua was crucified, he entrusted the care of their mother to one of his followers ...and how it hurt. Then he remembered watching him die. All these things he remembered with shame. Then he remembered the day he was with his mother and a group of his brother’s disciples when Yeshua himself suddenly appeared to all of them. He remembered looking into his mother’s eyes as he realized that everything she had told

him was the truth. No words were spoken between them. None needed to be. There were only tears. For the first time since he was a little boy he could look into his mother's eyes, and the shame he now felt was his own.

He remembered how over the years since his brother's resurrection he had done everything in his power to make it right with his mother and brother by telling everyone the truth about his brother. He remembered telling many others exactly what his mother had told him about his brother's conception, and how he hated himself for ever having doubted his mother and thinking the things he had about her. And now, Ananus had just called his mother a harlot. He knew he had to tell the truth, and he knew exactly how it would be received.

James: *"Our mother was far from being a harlot. She was a virgin when my brother was conceived in her."*

Ananus: *"What? I hope you understand the seriousness of testifying before this body. You'd be well advised to think long and hard about the claims you intend to make here. So let me ask you again: Who was Yeshua's father?"*

James: *"Yeshua is not of this world. He is the son of God Himself. Our mother was a virgin when she conceived my brother by the Holy Spirit."*

Ananus: *"This is utter blasphemy! You heard it for yourselves! This man claims Yeshua was the son of God and that his mother became pregnant as a virgin! What a convenient story! Is it not obvious that this story was concocted to defend the honor of a common mother who was a harlot? It would actually be touching that her sons would go to such extremes and make up a story to defend her if it weren't for the fact that this story has caused the deception of so many thousands of Jews who now actually think a dead man is Israel's Messiah! I ask, who anywhere has ever heard of a virgin becoming pregnant? Not just in humans, but in all of nature, what creature has ever become pregnant by itself? Such a thing is unheard of! Never has any creature become pregnant without its kind planting its seed in it. As absurd as it is to think that any creature can become pregnant by itself, James here seriously wants us to also believe that something can be impregnated by something that is not its own kind! Seriously James, God impregnating a human? Who has ever heard of anything like a camel giving birth to something other than a camel? Have you ever seen a goat give birth to a bird? You want us to believe a human could give birth to a son of God? You are asking us to believe something as absurd as a heifer giving birth to a lamb? Tell us James. Do you seriously believe something like this could ever happen?"*

James: *"Yes, Ananus, I could. If the Creator of Heaven and earth wanted it to be, it would be."*

Ananus: *"What fantastic claim couldn't you hide behind that kind of logic James? Listen to yourself. ...a heifer, never having been bred, giving birth to a lamb?! You have gone mad James. As touching as it is that you would go to such lengths to defend your mother's honor, the fact is you have deceived countless numbers of your brethren with*

your stories, and now your followers fault us, God's priesthood, for your brother's death, and they have turned against us! What are we supposed to do ...just let a mad-man lead an insurrection against God's priesthood? The Law says that such a person should die, and that is my recommendation to this Sanhedrin. James should die for his treachery against God and His priesthood. Let us be done with both of these brothers forever."

James is taken out of the city and stoned. Ananus now has blood on his hands and is deposed of his position as High Priest.

History records that four years later Ananus regains power as revolutionary commander of the rebel forces in Jerusalem. As such, he would have been very close to the sitting High Priest and the proceedings in the Temple.

That next Passover, as the High Priest was leading a heifer to be slaughtered for sacrifice, the animal lets out a moan and lies down. Here is how the story might well have unfolded from this point.

High Priest: *"What now?"*

Accompanying priests: *"Apparently our heifer here knows what's going to happen to her and she doesn't want to go!"* *Laughter*

High Priest: *"Very funny. Now don't just stand there. Help me get her back up."*

Accompanying priests: *"Uh ...High Priest?"*

High Priest: *"What?"*

Accompanying priests: *"We have a problem. This heifer is about to give birth!"*

High Priest: *"What! That's not possible! You know the lengths to which we go to make sure sacrificial heifers never come near a bull! You know the abomination it would be to sacrifice a pregnant cow! How is this possible? Who is responsible for letting a bull get near the heifers?"*

Accompanying priests: *"No one sir! Every precaution has been taken as always."*

High Priest: *"What do we do now?"*

Accompanying priest: *"I just saw Ananus heading toward the treasury. As a former High Priest, maybe he has some advice. Someone go and get him."*

A few minutes later...

Ananus: *"What seems to be the problem?"*

High Priest: *“Our heifer here is about to give birth!”*

Ananus: *“What! How can this be?”*

High Priest: *“That’s what I said!”*

Ananus: *“Thank God you found out here and you didn’t slaughter her! How can she be pregnant? Who is responsible for this? Why wasn’t she kept away from bulls?”*

High Priest: *“I have been assured all the precautions have been taken as usual and she has not been near any bulls!”*

Ananus: *“Good God man! You think I’m some kind of idiot? Heifers don’t get pregnant by themselves! You’re beginning to sound like that fool we did away with four years ago!”*

Now imagine the terror that must have gripped Ananus and the priests as they witness the heifer give birth to a lamb!

The Sign

“At the same festival also, a heifer, as she was led by the high priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple.”

-Josephus, Wars Book VI Part 3