

# The “Partings of the Ways” in Light of Patristic Use of the Gospel according to the Hebrews

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## Rethinking Q

This paper logically follows conclusions I have drawn elsewhere, the case for which I can unfortunately only summarize here. I am currently 400 pages into writing a book on the synoptic problem that supports the two-document hypothesis but challenges the standard view of Q. In my book I argue that Q likely contained much more than the portions of it that made it into both Matthew’s and Luke’s gospels.<sup>1</sup> I note that Luke, like most ancient authors working with multiple sources, works with one source at a time, something we can confirm by comparing Luke 4:31-6:19; 8:4-9:50; 18:15-42; 19:28-24:9 with its Markan counterparts. Luke makes almost no substantial changes or additions to Mark in these blocks. This suggests that in the alternating blocks – Luke 3:1-4:30; 6:20-8:3; 9:51-18:14; 19:1-27 – Luke is working with his second source, again making almost no substantial changes or additions to that source in these blocks.<sup>2</sup> In some sense, this “second source” looks much like Streeter and Taylor’s Proto-Luke, but I argue that Streeter and Taylor made two fundamental flaws in their theory: (1) they assumed that Matthew knew “Q” rather than their larger “Proto-Luke”; and (2) they believed that Luke was the author of Proto-Luke.<sup>3</sup> In my book, I show that much of the material that is unique to Luke has reasons it might not have commended itself to Matthew: the parables unique to Luke tend to “traffic in moral ambiguity,”<sup>4</sup> and Matthew’s non-sequential treatment of his second

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<sup>1</sup> For an earlier argument of mine for this, see David B. Sloan, “[The τῆς ἐξ ὑμῶν Similitudes and the Extent of Q](#),” *JSNJ* 38 (2016): 339-55. The argument is, of course, much more developed in my forthcoming book. For a sample of the argument in my book, focused especially on the Lukan *Sondergut* in Luke 7, see my recent paper, “[The Widow at Nain, the Sinful Woman Who Loved Much, and the Extent of Q](#),” presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society in March 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Again, for a sample of my argument, see Sloan, “[The Widow at Nain](#).”

<sup>3</sup> Cf. B. H. Streeter, “Fresh Light on the Synoptic Problem,” *The Hibbert Journal* 20 (1920-1921): 103-12; idem, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 199-222; Vincent Taylor, *Behind the Third Gospel: A Study of the Proto-Luke Hypothesis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926); idem, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 44-62 and 191-201.

<sup>4</sup> I take this quote, as well as the larger observation, from Garwood P. Anderson, “Seeking and Saving What Might Have Been Lost: Luke’s Restoration of an Enigmatic Parable Tradition,” *CBQ* 70 (2008): 729–49, here p. 732. Might Matthew have simply decided to avoid parables that compare God to an unjust judge or to a father who celebrates – without punishment – a son who squandered his wealth with prostitutes? Might Matthew have decided to avoid a parable that uses a Samaritan or a dishonest manager as examples the reader should follow? These very things

source was bound to cause passages to be overlooked.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately I demonstrate in my book that there are stylistic, thematic, theological, and structural reasons for concluding that “L” and “Q” were really just the portions of Matthew and Luke’s second source that Matthew omitted and included, respectively.

Defining Q differently opened a new possibility to me. It is typically assumed that Q was lost after Matthew and Luke included it in their gospels, but the church fathers speak of and even quote from gospels that are no longer in existence. What if one of these gospels was Q? Particularly popular among Jews who followed Jesus was the Gospel of the Hebrews. Jerome refers to it as “the Gospel that the Nazarenes and Ebionites use, ... which many call the authentic Gospel of Matthew” (*Comm. Matt.* 12.13, FC).<sup>6</sup> Why did many call this the *authentic* Gospel of Matthew? Might Papias’s report that Matthew wrote the oracles of the Lord in the Hebrew dialect be a reference not to canonical Matthew, but to the *Vorlage* of Q?<sup>7</sup> Might Gos. Thom. 13 be referring to the same work when contrasting Thomas’ insight with Peter’s (in the Gospel of Mark?) and Matthew’s (in the Gospel of the Hebrews?)<sup>8</sup> If so, then

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are argued by Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2000), 183. Hengel notes that Matthew’s parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-31) may have been an attempt to rewrite the parable of the Prodigal Son without the scandalous details.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, my discussion in “[The τίς ἐξ ὑμῶν Similitudes](#),” 347-48 (pp. 9-10 of the pdf), for how natural it would have been for Matthew to drop the parable of the Friend at Midnight in view of how he is using Q 11:2-4, 9-13 in the Sermon on the Mount. I also argue in the book that Matthew uses Q largely to build up the speeches in Matthew 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23-25, which causes him to omit much of the narration in Q. That Q itself was not simply a collection of sayings of Jesus is clear from the fact that Matthew occasionally retains Q’s narrative material (Q 3:2-3; 4:1-13, 16; 6:20a; 7:1-3, 6, 18, 20, 24; 9:57-60; 11:14-15). On this, see my paper “[Q as a Narrative Gospel](#),” though I have since changed my mind on what I called there “Significant Minor Agreements.” See also Mark Goodacre, *The Case Against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2002), 170-85. While I disagree with Goodacre’s argument that the narrational nature of the double tradition is due to Luke’s use of Matthew, his case that the double tradition has “a narrative sequence” is solid and very well demonstrated here.

<sup>6</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck; The Fathers of the Church 117 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 140–141.

<sup>7</sup> That Matthew and Luke accessed Q in the same Greek version is strongly suggested by their almost verbatim agreement between them on the wording of Q 3:7b-9, 17; 10:13-15; 11:23-26, 31-32; 13:34-35; 16:13; etc. See John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 73-74; Harry T. Fleddermann, *Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary*, Biblical Tools and Studies (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 41-46.

<sup>8</sup> On Gos. Thom. 13 as a reference to Q, see Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 166-67. See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 236-37; Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, TENT 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 262-63, for arguments that the references to Peter and Matthew are references to canonical Mark and Matthew. In an earlier SBL paper, I noted that Thomas 13’s depiction of Matthew as promoting Jesus as “a wise philosopher” is more fitting of Q, with its Wisdom Christology, than of Matthew, which downplays the emphasis on Wisdom (cf., e.g., Matt 23:34 with Luke 11:34). See David B. Sloan, “A Better Two-Document Hypothesis: Matthew’s and Luke’s Independent Use of Mark and the

we have four first- or early-second-century witnesses to the presence of two key gospels at the earliest stage. Two of these witnesses (Matthew and Luke) do not name their sources but attest to the presence of two sources in their efforts to harmonize Mark with a non-canonical gospel.<sup>9</sup> The other two witnesses (Thomas and the elder John) connect the two gospels to Peter and Matthew.

## Patristic References to the Gospel of the Hebrews

Unfortunately, we do not know a lot about what the Gospel of the Hebrews contained, and some things that have been attributed to it by the church fathers are suspect, either because they conflict with what another father has said or because they seem to have been misattributed.<sup>10</sup> For example, Jerome and Epiphanius attribute two very different baptism accounts to the “Nazarenes” and the “Ebionites” respectively, but each attributes his version to a Hebrew Gospel supposedly written by Matthew and connected with the Ebionites (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.13.2–3; Jerome, *Comm. Isa.* 11.1-3; cf. Jerome, *Comm. Matt.* 12.13).<sup>11</sup> This has led to a debate as to whether the patristic references are from one, two, or three different gospels. Traditionally scholars have distinguished between the more apocryphal quotations, which are thought to be the true Gospel of the Hebrews, and the quotations in Jerome that resemble the Gospel of Matthew, which have been dubbed “the Gospel of the Nazarenes.” Epiphanius’ quotations are then assigned to a third gospel, which scholars have called “the Gospel of the Ebionites,” though Epiphanius referred to it as “what [the Ebionites] call the Gospel according to Matthew” and “the Hebrew Gospel” (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.13.2).<sup>12</sup> Recent scholarship has called into

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Gospel According to the Hebrews,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Diego, CA, 24 November 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, on the Farrer hypothesis, Luke’s second source is not a non-canonical gospel, but canonical Matthew itself, but the Farrer hypothesis does not itself explain Matthew’s source for his non-Markan material, which gives evidence of itself being a document rather than a set of oral traditions. On this, see Alan Kirk, *Q in Matthew: Ancient Media, Memory, and Early Scribal Transmission of the Jesus Tradition*, LNTS 564 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016). The same could be said for the Matthean posteriority hypothesis. It postulates that Matthew’s second source was canonical Luke, but if so it is still clear from Luke’s use of source blocks that Luke worked with two *written* sources. My book addresses this at length.

<sup>10</sup> For the most recent attempt to distinguish between “probable” and “doubtful” fragments in the church fathers, see Andrew Gregory, *The Gospel According to the Hebrews and the Gospel of the Ebionites*, Oxford Early Christian Gospel Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). See also Petri Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 103-19, for an argument that Jerome mistook a collection of Nazarene anti-rabbinic arguments as being excerpts from Gos. Heb.

<sup>11</sup> Jerome connects this gospel to Matthew and to the Ebionites in his *Comm. Matt.* 12.13.

<sup>12</sup> The fact that when Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Eusebius quote Gos. Heb. they are talking about apocryphal sayings of Jesus, whereas when Epiphanius and Jerome quotes Gos. Heb. they are talking about passages also attested in Matthew and/or Luke does not mean that these are different gospels. The former turn to Gos. Heb. only to supplement the canonical gospels and therefore rarely attribute to it canonical sayings of Jesus,

question the distinguishing of sayings on the basis of whether they are “apocryphal” or “canonical,” so that more recent treatments of the subject have tended toward the references all being to two or even one gospel.<sup>13</sup>

Either way, we have less than three dozen quotations of this gospel, some showing it to contain passages in the double tradition or even the triple tradition, some showing it to contain passages unique to Matthew or to Luke, and some showing it to contain passages not in the canonical tradition. In a 2017 SBL paper, I demonstrated that the wordings in these quotations are repeatedly more primitive than the wordings in Matthew and Luke.<sup>14</sup> Time does not allow a rehashing of that argument here, so instead I have posted that paper online,<sup>15</sup> and with this paper I simply want to focus on another question: If the Gospel of the Hebrews was so important in the first century to leave its imprint on canonical Matthew, canonical Luke, the Gospel of Thomas, and Papias, what happened to it? I want to suggest that its popularity continued throughout the second century, but that ultimately it failed to be adopted by Western Christians and therefore it died with Jewish Christianity. In this sense I agree with John Kloppenborg, who suggests that Q may have disappeared because it failed “to be ‘adopted’ by one of the consolidating forces of the second and third centuries.”<sup>16</sup> By the fourth century, Eusebius would consider placing it among the books that are “not genuine” (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25.6), and Epiphanius would refer to it as “forged and mutilated” (*Pan.* 30.13.2). Jerome gives it renewed attention, but by the fifth century the gospel is barely named, with Philip of Side saying, “The Gospel according to the Hebrews

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while the latter turn to Gos. Heb. either to refute it by comparing the text to that of the canonical gospels (Epiphanius) or to find the supposed Hebrew original of what is in canonical Matthew (Jerome).

<sup>13</sup> For two gospels, see Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects*, 83-89; Andrew Gregory, *The Gospel According to the Hebrews*, 8-17. For one, see James R. Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 119-24. For the traditional three-gospel approach, see esp. A. F. J. Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> David B. Sloan, “[What If the Gospel according to the Hebrews Was Q?](#)” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Boston, MA, November 2017. See also Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition*, 37, 59-60; Edwards, *Hebrew Gospel*, and Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects*, 139-144. Klijn does not identify Q with either of the three gospels he sees represented in these traditions, but he does argue that many of the sayings here are pre-synoptic. Edwards holds that Luke used Gos. Heb. and that Matthew used Luke, obtaining these traditions second-hand. I argue that both Matthew and Luke both used Gos. Heb. directly, so Edwards is more a representative of the Matthean posteriority hypothesis whereas I am a representative of the two-document hypothesis. Luomanen highlights shared traditions, shared “socio-cultural and theological features,” and “more general thematic connections” between Q and Gos. Heb. Luomanen, however, argues that Gos. Heb. is post-synoptic and therefore suggests that Gos. Heb. was “a sort of post-synoptic reclaiming of some of Q’s central ideas by successors of the Q people” (143).

<sup>15</sup> See n. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 367.

and the Gospel attributed to Peter and Thomas were wholly repudiated (by the ancients), who asserted that they were jointly written by heretics.”<sup>17</sup>

Philip’s statement is clearly false. Clement of Alexandria quotes the Gospel of the Hebrews favorably in *Strom.* 2.9.45 and 5.14.96. Hegesippus “makes extracts from the Gospel according to the Hebrews” in his five treatises that are mentioned by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.22.8). Origen quotes the Gospel of the Hebrews at least three times (*Hom. Jer.* 15.3-4; *Comm. Jo.* 2.6; *Comm. Matt.* 15.14), and though he expresses a tentativeness about the gospel, he does not “wholly repudiate” it. Eusebius lists the “books which are not genuine” and then says, “Some have also counted the Gospel according to the Hebrews in which those of the Hebrews who have accepted Christ take a special pleasure” (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25, LCL). In other words, there are voices in 325 CE calling this work a falsification, but Eusebius himself is not ready to make that claim, though he makes the claim regarding the Acts of Paul, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, Barnabas, the Didache, and the Apocalypse of John.<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere Eusebius quotes the Gospel of the Hebrews favorably (*Theoph.* 4.12, 22). And Jerome makes over a dozen references to the Gospel of the Hebrews, without once repudiating it. By the fifth century the book can be written off, but it was not so easily written off in earlier centuries.

## The Gospel of the Hebrews in the Second Century

There is, however, a gap in the second century. I have already claimed that the Gospel of the Hebrews was prevalent in the first century, but the first father to mention it by name (not counting the references to “Matthew” in Thomas and Papias) was Clement of Alexandria toward the end of the second century. This fact has led modern scholars to conclude that the Gospel of the Hebrews originated in the second century, perhaps not long before the first explicit quotation of it. Meanwhile quotations of Jesus in 2 Clement and Justin Martyr that mix Matthean and Lukan wordings are thought to be based on faulty memory, parallel oral traditions, or even an early harmony of the synoptic gospels.<sup>19</sup> The fact is, however, that before Irenaeus, citations not just of the Gospel of the Hebrews but also of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John did not identify which gospel they came from.

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<sup>17</sup> For a compilation of references to Gos. Heb. in the church fathers, see esp. Edwards, *Hebrew Gospel*, 1-43, 263-91. I have taken this translation of Philip of Side from him.

<sup>18</sup> Regarding the Apocalypse of John, Eusebius first says it must be placed in the recognized works “if it seem well,” but then says it must be placed among the spurious works “if it should appear.” Eusebius gives Dionysius’s argument that Revelation is not a genuine writing of the apostle John in *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.

<sup>19</sup> See the survey in William L. Petersen, “Textual Evidence of Tatian’s Dependence upon Justin’s ‘ΑΠΟΜΝΗΜΟΝΕΥΜΑΤΑ,’” *NTS* 36 (1990): 512–34, esp. 512-13.

Irenaeus frequently attributes his gospel traditions to Matthew,<sup>20</sup> Luke,<sup>21</sup> or John<sup>22</sup> (never Mark), but before him we do not have one extant example of this practice, and even after him in the second century the practice is rare. Most often a quotation is introduced simply with “the Lord says,” “Jesus says,” or “he says,”<sup>23</sup> or there is no introductory formula.<sup>24</sup> There are a few exceptions:

1. While 2 Clement typically uses a “the Lord says” formula, we also have “Scripture says” (2 Clem. 2.4), “the Lord says in the Gospel” (2 Clem. 8.5), and “God says” (2 Clem. 13.4). Notably the reference to “the Gospel” is a reference to a saying parallel to but different from Luke 16:10-12.
2. The Didache makes four references to “the Gospel” (Did. 8.2; 11.3; 15.3-4).
3. Barnabas 4.14 introduces a gospel quotation with “as it is written.”
4. While Justin Martyr always uses a “Jesus says” formula in *1 Apology*, in *Dialogue with Trypho* he mentions “the memoirs of the apostles” fifteen times (*Dial.* 66; 100-7).
5. Theophilus of Antioch, writing shortly after Irenaeus, quotes the Gospels only three times, once without a formula (*Autol.* 2.13), once with an attribution to “the Gospel” (*Autol.* 3.13-14), and once with an attribution to John (*Autol.* 2.22).
6. Clement of Alexandria, also writing after Irenaeus, mentions Matthew twice (*Strom.* 1.21.147.5; *Quis div.* 17.4); Mark twice (*Quis div.* 5.1; *In Epistola Iudae Catholica*); Luke twice (*Paed.* 2.1; *Strom.* 1.21.145.2); John three times (*Paed.* 1.6.38.2; 5.12.81; *In Epistola Iudae Catholica*); the Gospel of the Hebrews once (*Strom.* 2.9.45.5); and the Gospel of the Egyptians twice (*Strom.* 3.9.63.1; 3.13.93.1).<sup>25</sup>

Not having sources cited, it is more challenging to determine which gospel (if any) a particular author is dependent upon for a tradition. Some sayings of Jesus are quoted in a fuller form than in either of the canonical gospels, which has led to the view that 2 Clement and Justin Martyr and others quoted from an early gospel harmony. In a study of the sayings of Jesus in 2 Clement, Helmut Koester notes the presence of elements of Matthean redaction in two sayings (2 Clem. 3.2; 6.2), suggesting that the author knew canonical Matthew. But then in other sayings 2 Clement agrees with Luke (who probably agreed with Q in both cases) for the wording (2 Clem. 6.1; 13.4). In still other cases 2 Clement offers “harmonized versions of the Matthean and Lukan texts” (2 Clem. 9.11; 5.2-4).<sup>26</sup> While it could be argued that the author is mixing the wording of Matthew and of Luke in his memory, in both cases we have two

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<sup>20</sup> *Adv. Haer.* 3.9.1-3; 3.11.8; 3.16.2; 3.21.9; 4.6.1.

<sup>21</sup> *Adv. Haer.* 1.23.1; 2.22.5; 3.9.1; 3.10.1, 4; 3.11.8; 3.14.2-3; 3.22.4; 5.21.2.

<sup>22</sup> *Adv. Haer.* 1.8.5; 1.9.2; 2.2.5; 2.22.3; 3.8.3; 3.11.2, 8; 3.16.5; 3.22.2; 4.2.3; 4.10.1; 5.18.2.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Clem. 13.2; 46.8; 2 Clem. 3.2; 4.2; 5.4; 6.1; 7.6; 9.11; Ign. *Smyrn.* 3.2; Pol. *Phil.* 7.2; Did. 9.5; Justin, *1 Apol.* 15; 16; 17; 19; 61; 63; 66; *Dial.* 17; 35; 47; 49; 51; 76; 81; 93; 96; 99; 100; 101; 105; 112; 120; 125; 140; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 12; 32; 33.

<sup>24</sup> Ign. *Eph.* 14.2; Ign. *Smyrn.* 6.1; Ign. *Pol.* 2.2; Pol. *Phil.* 5.2; 12.3; Did. 1.2-6; 3.7; 7.1; 11.7; 13.2; 16.1; Barn. 5.9; Diogn. 9.6; Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol.* 2.13; Tatian, *Or. Graec.* 13; 19; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 11.

<sup>25</sup> Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 428-29.

<sup>26</sup> Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 349-53, esp. p. 351.

later authors that attest the same non-canonical wording as 2 Clement. Second Clement's form for the brothers saying is also attested in Clement of Alexandria (*Ecl.* 20.3) and Epiphanius's *Gospel of the Ebionites* (*Pan.* 30.14.5). Second Clement's form for the saying about not fearing those who kill is also attested in Justin Martyr (*1 Apol.* 19.7) and the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* (17.5.2). These later works are likely not turning to 2 Clement for the wording of a saying of Jesus that can be found in Matthew and Luke. Instead these agreements attest to alternate wordings to the ones found in Matthew and Luke. Koester argues that this alternate wording comes from a sayings collection that was created by harmonizing Matthew and Luke.<sup>27</sup> But why not instead suppose that 2 Clement was working with the Gospel of the Hebrews, which we hold was Matthew's and Luke's shared non-Markan source? Epiphanius' testimony to the brothers saying is important because it links the non-canonical wording used here with traditions about the Hebrew gospel. The connection to the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* is also important because this is a work that integrates Jewish Christian sources.<sup>28</sup>

Koester also notes (1) that 2 Clement 8.5 quotes a more primitive version of Luke 16:11, 10, which is quoted similarly in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 2.34.3, and (2) that 2 Clement 4.2, 5 parallels Matt 7:21-23//Luke 6:46; 13:26-27, sometimes favoring Matthew's reading and sometimes favoring Luke's reading. In this latter example Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 16.11, and τὸ Ἰουδαϊκόν (according to Miniscule 1424) also share Clement's reading.<sup>29</sup> One final quotation in 2 Clement (12.2, 6) has parallels in *Gos. Thom.* 22 and *Gos. Eg.*, but Clement knows a more primitive version of the passage than the other two sources.<sup>30</sup> All this suggests that while the author of 2 Clement knows the Gospel of Matthew, he knows at least one other, non-canonical "gospel," which is somehow related to the Hebrew Gospel tradition.

The parallels in Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* suggest that 2 Clement was not the only one who used this non-canonical gospel. Justin Martyr clearly knows Matthew, Mark, and Luke, since he at times reflects Matthean (*1 Apol.* 15) or Lukan (*1 Apol.* 19; *Dial.* 76; 81) redaction or a detail known only from Mark (*Dial.* 106).<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the three

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<sup>27</sup> Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 351-53.

<sup>28</sup> On the Jewish-Christian nature of material behind the Pseudo-Clementines, see F. Stanley Jones, *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source on the History of Christianity: Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 1.27-71*, SBL Texts and Translations (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); Graham Stanton, "Jewish Christian Elements in the Pseudo-Clementine Writings," in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 305-24.

<sup>29</sup> Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 353-57.

<sup>30</sup> Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 357-60.

<sup>31</sup> He also reflects the birth narratives in Matthew (cf. *1 Apol.* 33.1, 5; 34.1) and Luke (cf. *1 Apol.* 33.5; *Dial.* 84; 100.5). Nowhere does he reflect specifically Johannine material. He seems to have received the saying in *1 Apol.* 61.4 (cf. John 3:3, 5) from a pre-Johannine tradition (Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 361).

synoptics could not have been Justin's only written gospel sources. For one, he quotes two sayings of Jesus that are unparalleled in the canonical gospels (*Dial.* 35.3; 47.5).<sup>32</sup> That the saying in *Dial.* 35.3, which is closely related to Matt 10:34-35//Luke 12:51-53, is based on an early tradition is suggested by the likelihood that Paul alludes to this saying in 1 Cor 11:18-19.<sup>33</sup> Second, he quotes several sayings in a form more primitive than what we find in Matthew and Luke (see esp. *1 Apol.* 15-16), one of which has the form also attested in 2 Clement. Third, in a catena of quotations in *Dial.* 35, Justin quotes two different versions of the saying about wolves in sheep's clothing in Matt 7:15, showing that he knows this saying from two different gospels, though it is found only once in the canonical gospels. The first quotation differs from the second in that the second contains Matthew's redactional "beware of false prophets." This suggests that Justin has both Matthew and Matthew's source here. This may be a Q saying that Luke has omitted. Jesus' opponents are portrayed as wolves elsewhere only in Matthew 10:16//Luke 10:3, a passage that, like Matthew 7:15, also portrays Jesus' disciples as sheep. Justin's quotations of Jesus seem to come primarily from Matthew, Luke, and their two shared sources.<sup>34</sup>

Clement of Alexandria is known to have utilized the Gospel of the Hebrews. Though he rarely attributes his quotations of Jesus to a particular gospel, he attributes the saying in *Strom.* 2.9.45.5 to the Gospel of the Hebrews. Might many of the hundreds of his unattributed quotations also come from the Gospel of the Hebrews? On the one hand, Clement knows the tradition that four gospels were "handed down to us" (*Strom.* 3.13.93.1; cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.5-7). On the other hand, the fact that Clement reflects the non-canonical forms of the sayings found in 2 Clement and Justin Martyr reveals that the Gospel of the Hebrews is well known to him and readily accessible to his memory. His attribution of other non-canonical sayings to "a gospel" (*Strom.* 5.10.63.7), to "the Lord" (*Strom.* 6.9.78.1), and to "Scripture" (*Strom.* 6.12.101.4) confirms that for Clement the authoritative gospels number more than four.<sup>35</sup> This suggests that Clement's interest in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as "the four gospels handed down to us" (*Strom.* 3.13.93.1) is still a new concept to him and does not prevent him from quoting other gospels, including the Gospel of the Hebrews. Watson notes: "Clement's comment [about the four gospels] seems to represent a transitional moment in which a

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<sup>32</sup> Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 361-62. If Koester is correct that the saying in *1 Apol.* 61.4 is independent of John 3:3, 5, then this saying is also a primitive Jesus saying that Justin did not obtain from the canonical gospels.

<sup>33</sup> Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 361-62.

<sup>34</sup> See also Leslie Lee Kline, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*, SBL Dissertation Series 14 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975). Kline notes parallels between Justin and the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies at *Dial.* 76.5; *1 Apol.* 16.5; and *1 Apol.* 61.4 (cf. *Ps.-Clem. Homilies* 19.2.5; 3.55.1; 11.26.2 respectively). These examples are mentioned in Petersen, "Textual Evidence," 513 n. 12. Space does not permit a treatment of the Pseudo-Clementines here, where Gos. Heb. material can also be demonstrated.

<sup>35</sup> Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 411-37.

differentiation within the field of gospel literature is beginning to take shape, while excluded texts may still be valued insofar as they preserve authoritative utterances of the Lord himself. The reference to four gospels may reflect the influence of Irenaeus, whose work Clement is elsewhere said to have known.”<sup>36</sup>

The same transition we see taking place in Alexandria at the end of the second century is also taking place at the same time in Antioch. Serapion, the bishop of Antioch from 191 to 211, previously approved the reading of the Gospel of Peter at Rhossus, though he himself had not read it, but once he learned of its potential heterodoxy, he changing his mind and listed details in the gospel that were not “in accordance with the true teaching of the Savior,” though “most” of the gospel was in accordance with it (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.12-3-6).<sup>37</sup> This shows that in the east shortly after the time of Irenaeus there was not the same concern for a fourfold gospel, but the increasing concern for orthodoxy (and the influence of Irenaeus) would change this scenario in the third century.

## Irenaeus and the Fourfold Gospel

Unlike Clement in Alexandria and Serapion in Antioch, Irenaeus in Lyons would not have known much about Christianity in Syria and beyond.<sup>38</sup> Though he is the first to mention “Ebionites” in our extant literature, he devotes only a few sentences to them and seems to be entirely dependent on Justin Martyr’s lost *Syntagma*.<sup>39</sup> There is no evidence that Irenaeus had ever directly encountered Ebionites or their teaching.<sup>40</sup> Instead, he uses Justin Martyr’s description of previous heresies to show the “source and root” of the Valentinian heresy, which is his main concern (*Adv. Haer.* 1.22.2, ANF<sup>1</sup>). It is in this

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<sup>36</sup> Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 427-28. On Clement’s knowledge of Origen, see Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.13.9. Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 435-36, seems to assume that unattributed

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of this and how Serapion’s views of gospels outside the four differed from those of Eusebius, who quoted him, see Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 446-52.

<sup>38</sup> Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 473, rightly notes that “Gospels popular in parts of the East—*GPet*, *GTh*, *GEgy*—may have been virtually unknown in the West.... [T]he fourfold gospel will represent a restriction in parts of the East and an expansion in parts of the West, notably in Rome itself [which was slow to accept the Gospel of John].” See also p. 493.

<sup>39</sup> He devotes three sentences to the Ebionites in *Adv. Haer.* 1.26.2 and mentions them a few other times (*Adv. Haer.* 3.11.7; 3.21.1; 4.33.4; 5.1.3; cf. 3.15), but without adding much detail. On Justin Martyr’s *Syntagma* as the main source for Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.23-27, compare Irenaeus’s descriptions of Simon Magus and Menander (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.23) with those in Justin Martyr’s extant works (*1 Apol.* 26, 56). Pace Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects*, 18-19, who, while rejecting the idea that Justin Martyr was Irenaeus’s source, still argues that Irenaeus was dependent on an eastern source for his information about the Ebionites.

<sup>40</sup> Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects*, 18, states: “[N]othing in his work suggests the Ebionites were a special problem in the environs of Lyons.”

context that he defends the fourfold gospel, but even here his interest is first in refuting those who did not accept all four gospels and then in refuting those who use Gos. Truth. He writes:

So firm is the ground upon which [the four] Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and, starting from these [gospels], each one of them endeavours to establish his own peculiar doctrine. For *the Ebionites, who use Matthew's Gospel only*, are confuted out of this very same, making false suppositions with regard to the Lord. But *Marcion, mutilating that according to Luke*, is proved to be a blasphemer of the only existing God, from those [passages] which he still retains. Those, again, who separate Jesus from Christ, alleging that Christ remained impassible, but that it was Jesus who suffered, *preferring the Gospel by Mark*, if they read it with a love of truth, may have their errors rectified. Those, moreover, *who follow Valentinus, making copious use of that according to John*, to illustrate their conjunctions, shall be proved to be totally in error by means of this very Gospel, as I have shown in the first book. Since, then, *our opponents do bear testimony to us*, and make use of these [gospels], our proof derived from them is firm and true. [*Adv. Haer.* 3.11.7, ANF<sup>1</sup>, emphasis added]

These are the four gospels that Irenaeus knows and uses in the west, and he shows that even his opponents use these gospels, thereby “bear[ing] testimony to us.” He does not seem to be aware of any differences between the Ebionites’ version of Matthew and his own, other than the language (cf. *Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1). He assumes that his Greek Matthew is simply a translation of their Hebrew version.<sup>41</sup> His emphasis on four gospels is not designed to exclude the Gospel of the Hebrews but to support the four gospels he knows and uses. Irenaeus continues:

It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the “pillar and ground” of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh. [*Adv. Haer.* 3.11.8, ANF<sup>1</sup>]

Far from being an arbitrary reason for there being exactly four gospels, Irenaeus’s point is that the four gospels represent worldwide Christianity. We have four gospels because, as he said at the beginning of Book 3, the apostles travelled

*to the ends of the earth*, ... proclaiming the peace of heaven to men, who indeed do *all equally and individually* possess the Gospel of God. Matthew also issued a written Gospel *among the Hebrews in their own dialect*, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome [with their preaching recorded by Mark and Luke]. ... Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel *during his residence at Ephesus in Asia*. [*Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1, ANF<sup>1</sup>]

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<sup>41</sup> So Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 460.

The four corners of the earth – including Romans, Greeks in Asia, and Hebrews in Judea – received the gospel, and so it is fitting that there are four gospels.<sup>42</sup> The four cherubim imagery that follows also reflects this worldwide nature of Christianity since “the Word, the Artificer of all, ... sitteth upon the cherubim, and contains all things” (*Adv. Haer.* 3.11.8, ANF<sup>1</sup>). Irenaeus’s argument rests on the assumption that what Matthew preached among the Hebrews is what is recorded in Greek Matthew. To be sure, he considers the Ebionites heretics, but not because of the gospel that they use so much as their failure to listen to that gospel, their failure to adopt the other gospels, and their failure to accept Paul’s writings (*Adv. Haer.* 1.26.2).

Despite Irenaeus’s ignorance of the differences between the Gospel of the Hebrews and Greek Matthew, his argument for four gospels would have a major impact on later Christian thinkers. As we have seen, Clement of Alexandria knows Irenaeus’s fourfold gospel, but this does not stop him from unapologetically quoting the Gospel of the Hebrews. His student Origen, however, is much more apologetic, qualifying each explicit quotation with “if anyone accepts it” or “if it pleases one to receive it, not as an authority, but as an example of the proposed question” (*Hom. Jer.* 15.3-4; *Comm. Jo.* 2.6; *Comm. Matt.* 15.14). Origen also makes references to the four gospels in various places (*Cont. Cels.* 5.56; *Hom. Gen.* 13.2; *Hom. Lk.* 1.1; 29.6; *Comm. Jo.* 1.6; *Hom. Cant.* 2; etc.). In his first homily on Luke, Origen takes the first part of Luke 1:1 (“many have *tried* to compose an account”) as “an accusation against those who rushed into writing gospels without the grace of the Holy Spirit,” whereas he takes the second part of Luke 1:1 (“that are *clearly known among us*”) as a reference to “Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke, [who] did not ‘try’ to write [but] wrote their Gospels when they were filled with the Holy Spirit.” Origen then lists the failed attempts: “One of them is entitled *According to the Egyptians*, another *According to the Twelve Apostles*. Basilides, too, dared to write a gospel and give it his own name. ... I know one gospel called *According to Thomas*, and another *According to Matthias*” (*Hom. Lk.* 1.1, FC). Notably absent here is the Gospel of the Hebrews, which Origen elsewhere cites and therefore clearly knows. This would suggest that Origen is not ready to consider the Gospel of the Hebrews, which is traditionally linked to Matthew, as one of the failed attempts to write a gospel “without the grace of the Holy Spirit,” but he is also trying to stay in line with the new catholic consensus on the fourfold

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<sup>42</sup> I am indebted to Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 467-472, for drawing my attention to Irenaeus’s interest in geography here. He notes (p. 468) that “the fourfold canonical gospel may be seen as a plea for East-West consensus, one that acknowledges the contributions of both.” Watson notes how important Irenaeus was for winning Western Christianity over to the Gospel of John, which he takes to be a key interest of Irenaeus in his geographical comments.

gospel. A century later Eusebius would further emphasize the catholic consensus but also express an uncertainty about the Gospel of the Hebrews.

## The Fourfold Gospel in the East

But the “consensus” that arose at the turn of the second to the third century was hardly universal. Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Jerome would remark in the fourth century that Jewish Christians still use the Gospel of the Hebrews. Theodoret would remark in the fifth century that Syriac Christians throughout his diocese were still using the Diatessaron (Theodoret, *Haer. fab.* 1.20). This shows that while the limitation of gospels to four took root in the Greek- and Latin-speaking churches at the end of the second century, it took a while longer to take root in the Syriac-speaking churches.

Unfortunately our sources are limited for Syriac-speaking Christianity, but we know that the gospel was met with great success in the east. Philip Jenkins notes that Christianity was the official religion of Edessa, Armenia, Georgia, and possibly Adiabene before it was the official religion of Rome.<sup>43</sup> We know of great fourth-century thinkers like Aphrahat and Ephrem the Syrian, for whom the Diatessaron was “the Gospel.” Our knowledge of the Diatessaron is limited as well. Greek-speaking Christians thought it to be a harmony of the four gospels (hence the Greek name διὰ τεσσάρων), but most scholars have recognized that Tatian must have used a fifth source, since there are “peculiar readings and additions” in the Diatessaron.<sup>44</sup> Jan Joosten notes the presence of Western Aramaic elements in the Diatessaron and concludes that the Diatessaron incorporated not only the four Greek gospels, but also “a West Aramaic Gospel tradition that was [already] in use among Syriac-speaking Christians of [Tatian’s] time.”<sup>45</sup> Joosten asks why Tatian would have used a fifth source, thereby “deviat[ing] further than necessary from the canonical Gospels.” He concludes: “[F]or Tatian, and for the community for whom he was writing, the fifth source of the *Diatessaron* was not apocryphal but had canonical status. Tatian accepted the testimony of the source because it represented the Christian heritage of the Syriac-speaking church.”<sup>46</sup>

It would not at all be surprising if the Gospel of the Hebrews, which was composed in either Hebrew or Aramaic, had been “the gospel” for Syriac-speaking Christians before the Diatessaron was

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<sup>43</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia--and How It Died* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 54.

<sup>44</sup> Jan Joosten, “West Aramaic Elements in the Old Syriac and Peshitta Gospels,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 271-89, esp. p. 288.

<sup>45</sup> Joosten, “West Aramaic Elements,” 288-89.

<sup>46</sup> Joosten, “West Aramaic Elements,” 289.

introduced at the end of the second century. Pantaenus attests to having found a copy of Hebrew Matthew in India in the middle of the second century (*Hist. eccl.* 5.10.3).<sup>47</sup> This gospel that had been so significant at the end of the first century to leave its mark on Matthew, Luke, Thomas, and the Elder John, had continued to make its mark in the second century not only on 2 Clement, Justin Martyr, the basic source for the Pseudo-Clementines, and Clement of Alexandria, but also in Syriac-speaking Christianity and as far as India. Tatian, who had studied under Justin Martyr, must have been familiar with the Gospel of the Hebrews. Therefore when he created the Diatessaron, he sought to harmonize not just the four gospels that would later become canonical in the west but also the Hebrew/Aramaic gospel that was known in the east. His harmony, then, would have offered far more Jesus traditions than the Gospel of the Hebrews had, and therefore the Diatessaron would have easily replaced the Gospel of the Hebrews in the east. Whereas Syriac-speaking Christians in the second century would have known one gospel, the Gospel of the Hebrews; Syriac-speaking Christians in the fourth century would have known one gospel, the Diatessaron. When Rabbula and Theodoret and other Syrian bishops began to replace the Diatessaron in the fifth century, the few traditions in the Gospel of the Hebrews that did not make it into Matthew or Luke but made it into the Diatessaron would have been lost. And by this time the distinct gospel they were taken from was mostly forgotten.

This is not to say that the Gospel of the Hebrews entirely disappeared in the fifth century. James Edwards notes an Islamic Hadith that states that Muhammad's relative Waraqa ibn Naufal used to "write from the Gospel in Hebrew as much as Allah wished him to write."<sup>48</sup> Edwards also notes that in the ninth century Nicephorus is able to relate how many lines long the Gospel of the Hebrews is.<sup>49</sup> It likely survived in various places that were less controlled by ambitious Byzantine bishops like Theodoret. But already its days were numbered due to its exclusion from Irenaeus's fourfold gospel and due to the later replacing of the Diatessaron with the fourfold Peshitta Gospels.

## Conclusion

When I set out to write this paper, I expected to be able to defend a simple thesis: that the Gospel of the Hebrews was *the* Jewish-Christian gospel and that it disappeared with Jewish Christianity. I still think that if Ebionitism had survived the Islamic expansion of the seventh century, the Gospel of the Hebrews would have survived as well. But writing this made it clear to me that the story of the Hebrew

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<sup>47</sup> Edwards, *Hebrew Gospel*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Edwards, *Hebrew Gospel*, 42.

<sup>49</sup> Edwards, *Hebrew Gospel*, 21-22, 105-6.

Gospel is bigger than the story of “Jewish Christianity.” If I am correct that it had a significant impact on Matthew, Luke, Thomas, Papias, 2 Clement, Justin Martyr, Tatian’s Diatessaron, Clement of Alexandria, Hegesippus, and the Pseudo-Clementines as well as on Origen and Eusebius and Jerome, then this was not simply an *Ebionite* gospel. It was a gospel with almost worldwide appeal. It was a gospel more important in the second century than either Mark or John and, if we consider Syrian Christianity, more important than canonical Matthew or Luke. This would also suggest that the distinction between “Jewish Christianity” and “Christianity” is a difficult distinction to make. Gentile Christians in the second century embraced the Jewish God, the Jewish Scriptures, the Jewish messiah, Jewish theology, Jewish ethics, Jewish eschatology, and the most Jewish of the gospels. The later rejection of that Jewish gospel was not an intentional rejection of Judaism but an embracing of Greek Matthew accompanied by an unawareness that Greek Matthew was not a simple translation of the Hebrew Gospel. Or in the east it was not an intentional rejection of Judaism but an embracing of a more complete account of the life and sayings of Jesus in the Diatessaron. I had hoped to be able to weigh in through my research on the so-called “parting of the ways.” Instead all I can say is that the questions of Jewishness and the development of Christian orthodoxy are more complicated than we may be inclined to think. This demands that much closer attention be paid to the Gospel of the Hebrews than has been paid in the past.