

‘I Have Come to Abolish Sacrifices’ (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.16.5): Re-examining a Jewish Christian Text and Tradition*

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The *Gospel of the Ebionites* is a ‘text’ that only exists as fragments cited in and extrapolated from the heresiological writings of Epiphanius (*Pan.* 30). Like *Recognitions* 1.27–71, the *Gospel of the Ebionites* is one of a number of second- and third-century Jewish Christian sources, texts and traditions alleging that Jesus rejected animal sacrifice. In this article, I seek to review the history of research on this particular text and tradition and explore its significance as a case study in the use of non-canonical gospel traditions in New Testament studies.

Keywords: non-canonical gospels, Ebionites, Epiphanius, *Gospel of the Ebionites*, Jesus, Jewish Christianity, sacrifice

1. Introduction

In his 2013 Presidential Address to the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, Christopher Tuckett suggested that our discipline needs to move beyond its traditional canonical boundaries.¹ Francis Watson has also recently argued that ‘gospel writing’ must now be understood in its wider context of post- and non-Synoptic gospel compositions.² These methodological observations underscore the fact that traditional canonical limits have all too often overdetermined

* I would like to thank Professors Francis Watson and Paul Trebilco for the invitation to submit an article to this journal in light of my recent monograph on the relationship(s) between the historical Jesus, sacrifice, and the Temple. See Simon J. Joseph, *Jesus and the Temple: The Crucifixion in its Jewish Context* (SNTSMS 165; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Special thanks also to Prof. Watson for his editorial comments and suggestions on this paper.

1 C. M. Tuckett, ‘What is “New Testament Study”? The New Testament and Early Christianity’, *NTS* 60 (2014) 157–84. See also H. Koester, ‘Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels’, *HTR* 73 (1980) 105–30.

92 2 F. Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

scholarly interest in early Christianity and that New Testament specialists sometimes assume that non- or post-canonical gospel literature is somehow 'inauthentic' and/or need not be considered. It is 'historiographically fallacious', however, to assume that "canonical" works must be chronologically prior to extracanonical works'.³ The use of non-canonical texts and traditions must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The *Gospel of Thomas*, for example, contains non-Synoptic sayings which may be either pre- or post-Synoptic and reflect Jewish Christian traditions,⁴ the most obvious one being L. 12, the saying about 'James the Just'.⁵ What do we make of this *text*, dated to the early second century CE, that is framed as a Jesus-saying, refers to an historical figure known to have died in 62 CE, and represents a *tradition* presumably transmitted by early Jewish Christians? Similarly, in 1 Cor 4.8, Paul refers to some members of the Corinthian community as having 'begun to reign' (ἐβασιλεύσατε). *Thomas*, too, characterises the seeker as one who will 'reign (βασιλεύση) over the All' (*P.Oxy.* IV.654.5–9; cf. L. 2). The *Gospel of the Hebrews* contains a version of the same saying: 'The one who wonders will reign' (*Clem. Alex. Strom.* 2.9.45.5; 5.14.96.3).⁶ Clement of Alexandria attributes this particular saying to the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, illustrating that the literary relationships between the Jesus tradition, the *Gospel of the Hebrews* and the *Gospel of Thomas* are complex and multi-faceted.⁷

While the writings of the New Testament are rightly regarded as preserving the earliest extant traditions of Christianity, if our interests also include the literary development of 'gospel' compositions, diverse theological developments and/or the various ways in which Jesus was 'remembered', then we must attend not only to canonical literature but also to non-canonical *texts* and *traditions*.⁸ In some cases, we may be able to establish the *terminus post quem* for a *text*, but not its *tradition*,⁹ especially when Jesus 'traditions' circulated in a wide variety of forms and were, at various times, subject to censure and suppression. In this article, I seek to

3 J. S. Kloppenborg, 'A New Synoptic Problem: Mark Goodacre and Simon Gathercole on Thomas', *JSNT* 36 (2014) 202–3.

4 See G. Quispel, 'The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament', *VC* 11 (1957) 189–207; *idem*, 'L'Évangile selon Thomas et les Clémentines', *VC* 12 (1958) 181–96; *idem*, 'Some Remarks on the Gospel of Thomas', *NTS* 5 (1959) 276–90; *idem*, "'The Gospel of Thomas" and the "Gospel of Hebrews"', *NTS* (1966) 371–82.

5 J. Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997) 163; M. Myllykoski, 'James the Just in History and Tradition: Perspectives of Past and Present Scholarship (Part II)', *CBR* 6 (2007) 50–2; P. Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish Christian Sects and Gospels* (VCSup 110; Leiden: Brill, 2012) 5.

6 A. F. J. Klijn, 'Das Hebräer- und das Nazoräerevangelium', *ANRW* 2.25/5 (1988) 3997–4033.

7 Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 234. See also P. Luomanen, 'The Jewish-Christian Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas', *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung-Rezeption-Theologie* (ed. J. Frey, E. Popkes and J. Schröter; BZNW; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2008) 119–53.

8 Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 512.

9 Tuckett, 'What is "New Testament Study?"', 172. So also Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 610.

re-examine a Jewish Christian text and tradition as a case study in the use of non-canonical gospel traditions in New Testament studies.

A number of second- and third-century Jewish Christian texts and traditions alleged that Jesus rejected and opposed animal sacrifice. Here the term 'Jewish Christianity' refers to ethnically Jewish members of the Jesus movement who maintained and combined loyalty towards Jewish law with reverence for Jesus.¹⁰ The term has recently come under fire as definitionally imprecise,¹¹ with accusations of it facilitating 'a modernist heresiology',¹² and reinscribing a discourse which attempted to expel Jewish influences from Christianity by constructing Judaism as separate and distinct from Christianity.¹³ The term is admittedly problematic, both because it is a *modern* scholarly category and because it is linked to heresiological discourse. Moreover, there is little agreement on precisely what the *Jewishness* in Jewish Christianity is supposed to refer to, especially when 'Jewishness' typically incorporates ethnicity, ideology, practice,¹⁴ geography and socio-cultural recognition by other Jews.¹⁵

According to Justin (*ca.* 150 CE), there was room in the early church for both Jewish and Gentile Christians (as long as the former did not attempt to 'Judaize' the latter).¹⁶ This relative inclusivism had changed by the fourth-century when heresiologists like Epiphanius began to describe Jewish Christians as

different from Jews, and different from Christians, only in the following. They disagree with Jews because they have come to faith in Christ; but since they are still fettered by the Law – circumcision, the Sabbath, and the rest – they are not in accord with Christians.¹⁷

Note here that Epiphanius' *definition* of a 'Christian' *excludes* Jewish practice. Jerome gives us a similarly exclusive description of Jewish Christians:

10 S. C. Mimouni, *Le Judéo-christianisme ancien: Essais historiques* (Paris: Cerf, 1998) 70; M. Jackson-McCabe, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik, eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007); J. C. Paget, *Jews, Christians, and Jewish Christians in Antiquity* (WUNT 251; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

11 D. Boyarin, 'Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to which is Appended a Correction of my *Border Lines*)', *JQR*, 99.1 (2009) 7–36, at 7.

12 K. L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

13 Boyarin, 'Rethinking Jewish Christianity', 23.

14 F. J. A. Hort, *Judaistic Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 1894); Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: Étude sur les relations entre Chrétiens et Juifs dans l'Empire Romain (135–425)* (Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1948).

15 A. F. Segal, 'Jewish Christianity', *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (ed. H. W. Attridge and G. Hata; Leiden: Brill, 1992) 326–51, at 348.

16 Justin, *Dial.* 47.1–2.

17 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 29.7.5–6; trans. F. Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Book 1 (Sects 1–46)* (Leiden: Brill, 1987) 117–18.

They believe in Christ, the Son of God ... but since they want to be Jews and Christians, they are neither Jews nor Christians.¹⁸

The study of Jewish Christianity represents a particularly pertinent and pressing methodological problem in New Testament studies. Although the Jewish origins and matrices of Christianity continue to represent some of the most promising and fruitful horizons of research for the historical, literary and theological development of the New Testament, the study of Jewish Christianity has long been fraught with problematic assumptions about its 'late' and secondary status.¹⁹ Helmut Koester, for example, suggests that 'later Jewish Christianity was not due to any continuing, separate tradition which had originated in the very beginning of Christian history. Rather, it was formed in the constant controversy with gentile Christianity.'²⁰ Alternatively, Walter Bauer, in his influential monograph *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, suggested that Jewish Christians were ultimately declared heretics even though they 'probably had remained what they had been in the time of James the Just'.²¹

To be sure, there were indeed multiple 'types' of Jewish Christianity.²² Justin refers to different kinds of Jewish Christians. Origen refers to *two* kinds of 'Ebionites': those who believed in Jesus' virgin birth and those who did not. Similarly, Eusebius reports that some Ebionites rejected the virgin birth, but

there were others of the same name but [they] avoided the strange absurdity of the former, and did not deny that the Lord was born of a virgin and the Holy Spirit. But nevertheless in as much as they also refused to confess that he was God, Word and Wisdom, they turned aside into the impiety of the former, especially when, like them, they did their best to observe strictly the bodily worship of the Law.²³

18 Jerome, *Letter* 112, 13, cited in A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (NovTSup 36; Leiden: Brill, 1973) 198–203.

19 J. D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek: A Contested Identity*, vol. III: *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 589 notes that Jewish Christian groups 'featured strongly in the second century' and that '[t]heir claim to be the most directly continuous with James and the mother church of Jerusalem was harder to deny than the heresiologists would have acknowledged' (p. 806).

20 H. Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1: *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter/Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 203.

21 W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (trans. by the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins; ed. R. A. Kraft and G. Krodel, with Appendices by G. Strecker; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971²) 236; originally published as *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (BHT 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1934).

22 R. E. Brown, 'Not Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity but Types of Jewish/Gentile Christianity', *CBQ* 45 (1983) 74–9; R. Longenecker, 'Jews, Hebrews and Christians: Some Needed Distinctions', *NovT* 24 (1983) 194–208.

23 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.27.1–6, cited in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 141.

It is no easy task to identify ideological and genealogical continuities between early and later Jewish Christianity. Moreover, it may be all too easy to reaffirm and reinscribe patristic identifications of *early* Jewish Christianity as ‘orthodox’ and *later* Jewish Christianity as aberrant syncretistic ‘heresy’.²⁴ Nonetheless, even if *early* Jewish Christianity includes Jesus’ family,²⁵ the ‘Twelve’, the letters of James and Jude, Q and the Gospel of Matthew, and *later* Jewish Christianity represents a spectrum of groups identified as Nazoreans, Ebionites and Elchasaites by the early Church Fathers,²⁶ we must still try to assess – on a case-by-case basis – the historical origin and significance of Jewish Christian traditions, especially when they represent non-Synoptic traditions.

2. The Jewish Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice

The two most prominent examples of an anti-animal sacrifice tradition in Jewish Christianity can be found in the *Gospel of the Ebionites* cited by Epiphanius and the Jewish Christian source underlying *Recognitions* 1.27–71,²⁷ the latter of which can be dated to *ca.* 200 CE.²⁸ The rejection of animal sacrifice is a distinctive theme in *Rec.* 1.27–71.²⁹ It is widely held that the *Homilies* and the *Recognitions* are based on an earlier source, the *Grundschrift* which contained Jewish Christian traditions.³⁰ While the Pseudo-Clementine tradition has long been regarded as representing a significant wing of the *Jewish Christian Jesus*

24 R. A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period until its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem: Brill/Magnes, 1988).

25 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.7.14; 3.11–12, 19–20; 32.5–6; 4.22.4. See also R. Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990).

26 F. S. Jones, *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source on the History of Christianity: Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 1.27–71* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995) 164 n. 21.

27 R. Bauckham, ‘The Origin of the Ebionites’, *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (ed. P. J. Tomson and D. Lambers-Petry; WUNT 158; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 162–81, at 165, 168.

28 G. Stanton, ‘Jewish Christian Elements in the Pseudo-Clementine Writings’, *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, 324; O. Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr’s Proof-Text Tradition. Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (NovTSup 56; Leiden: Brill, 1987) 252–3; Jones, *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source*, 164–6. J. Bourgel, ‘Reconnaissances 1.27–71, ou la réponse d’un groupe judéo-chrétien de Judée au désastre du soulèvement de Bar-Kokhba’, *NTS* 61 (2015) 39–49, at 41 argues that the author of *Rec.* 1.27–71’s ‘opposition farouche aux sacrifices sanglants’ is post-135 CE.

29 Jones, *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source*, 65–6.

30 J. L. Martyn, ‘Clementine Recognitions 1.33–71, Jewish Christianity, and the Fourth Gospel’, *God’s Christ and his People: Studies in Honour of Nils Alstrup Dahl* (ed. J. Jervell and W. A. Meeks; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977) 265–95, 274; A. Stötzel, ‘Die Darstellung der ältesten Kirchengeschichte nach den Pseudo-Clementinen’, *VC* 36 (1982) 24–37, at 29; R. E. Van Voorst, *The Ascents of James: History and Theology of a Jewish-Christian Community* (SBLDS 112; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989).

movement,³¹ these writings represent a literary puzzle with formidable problems.³² The general tendency today is to shy away from constructing models that apply a specific group-marker to *Rec.* 1.27–71, although some continue to identify it as Ebionite.³³ A number of scholars now emphasise the fourth-century context(s) of these texts' final redactions.³⁴ The source underlying *Recognitions* 1 may not conform to our preconceptions of what is normatively 'Jewish' or 'Christian',³⁵ but it would be unwise to regard this tradition as mere source material for the rhetorical goals of a fourth-century redactor.

The prevailing assumption in contemporary scholarship is that this 'Jewish Christian' tradition represents a late response to the destruction of the Temple,³⁶ i.e. a harmonising, syncretistic, *post*-Synoptic development. But *non*-Synoptic material is also present in these texts. Some scholars think that it would have been 'unthinkable' for pre-70 CE Jews to reject the sacrificial system,³⁷ and so the anti-cultic tradition must reflect (Christian?) 'opposition to

- 31 Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 71: 'The group whence came the sources of Pseudo-Clementine literature showed some particular beliefs, for example with regard to the eating of meat and to sacrifices, which may be explained by their origin among groups of Jews.' For the *Jewish* (Christian) identity of the Pseudo-Clementines, see D. Boyarin, 'Justin Martyr Invents Judaism', *CH* 70 (2001) 459; A. Y. Reed, "'Jewish Christianity" as Counter-history? The Apostolic Past in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies', *Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. G. Gardner and K. Osterloh; TSAJ 123; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 204–13.
- 32 Stanton, 'Jewish Christian Elements in the Pseudo-Clementine Writings', 305.
- 33 Bauckham, 'The Origin of the Ebionites', 163; J. C. Paget, 'The Ebionites in Recent Research', *idem*, *Jews, Christians, and Jewish Christians in Antiquity* (WUNT 251; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 338–9. On Epiphanius' association of the Pseudo-Clementines and the Ebionites, see also J. Magnin, 'Notes sur l'Ébionitisme', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 23 (1973) 233–65; Martyn, 'Clementine Recognitions 1, 33–71', 265–95; S. Häkkinen, 'Ebionites', *A Companion to Second-Century 'Heretics'* (ed. A. Marjanen and P. Luomanen; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 247–8, at 257.
- 34 N. Kelley, *Knowledge and Religious Authority in the Pseudo-Clementines: Situating the Recognition in Fourth-Century Syria* (WUNT 11/213; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) 1–26.
- 35 E.g. R. Boustani and A. Yoshiko Reed, 'Blood and Atonement in the Pseudo-Clementines and *The Story of the Ten Martyrs*: The Problem of Selectivity in the study of "Judaism" and "Christianity"', *Henoch* 30 (2008), 333–64, at 362.
- 36 Reed, "'Jewish Christianity"', 211. Bauckham, 'The Origin of the Ebionites', 167. For the tendency to date Jewish Christianity to the second or third century, see J. Munck, 'Jewish Christianity in Post-Apostolic Times', *NTS* 6 (1960) 103–16; *idem*, 'Primitive Jewish Christianity and Later Jewish Christianity: Continuation or Rupture?', *Aspects du Judéo-Christianisme: Colloque de Strasbourg 23–25 avril 1964* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960) 77–93.
- 37 C. A. Evans, 'The Jewish Christian Gospel Tradition', *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, 241–77, at 252–3. P. M. Casey, 'Culture and Historicity: The Cleansing of the Temple', *CBQ* 59 (1997) 306–32, at 322 dismisses the idea as 'culturally inappropriate'. So also H. K. Bond, *The Historical Jesus: A Guide for The Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2012) 139–40.

second-century Jewish hopes to rebuild the temple'.³⁸ But the assumption that Jewish Christians only changed their attitude to the Temple *after* its destruction is not particularly compelling since 'those who had a positive attitude towards the worship usually ended up reinterpreting its significance, instead of starting to think that the whole thing was misconstrued from the very beginning'.³⁹ Moreover, a number of Jewish Christian texts and groups did not accept or endorse the Mosaic Torah at face value, but regarded 'some parts of it as obsolete or corrupt'.⁴⁰ Indeed, the hostility between the earliest Jewish Christians and the Sadducees – illustrated by James' assassination – suggests that Jesus' Jewish followers quickly detached themselves from participation in the Temple cult.⁴¹

The idea that the Ebionites represent an early and original form of Christianity has a long history in New Testament scholarship.⁴² The Ebionites (Ἐβιωνᾶῖοι) are first mentioned *ca.* 175 CE by Irenaeus.⁴³ They are also mentioned by Hippolytus,⁴⁴ Tertullian,⁴⁵ Origen,⁴⁶ Eusebius⁴⁷ and Epiphanius.⁴⁸ The early Church Fathers came up with a number of ways to ridicule Ebionites for their apparent self-identification as 'The Poor'.⁴⁹ Today, scholars question the utility of the term 'Ebionite' as it is unclear whether there was one or more Ebionite groups and

38 G. A. Koch, 'A Critical Investigation of Epiphanius' Knowledge of the Ebionites: A Translation and Critical Discussion of Panarion 30' (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1976) 344, and *Rec.* 1.39, 64.

39 Luomanen, *Recovering*, 164 n. 40.

40 See W. L. Petersen, 'Constructing the Matrix of Judaic Christianity from Texts', *Le Judéo-Christianisme dans tous ses états: acts du colloque de Jérusalem 6-10 Juillet 1998* (ed. F. S. Jones and S. C. Mimouni; Paris: Cerf, 2001) 126-45, at 136-7.

41 M. Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (trans. J. Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 56-7.

42 S. C. Mimouni, *Early Judaeo-Christianity: Historical Essays* (Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 13; trans. R. Fréchet; Leuven: Peeters, 2012) 66; F. C. Baur, *Über den Ursprung des Episcopats in der christlichen Kirche* (Tübingen: Ludwig Friedrich Fues, 1838) 123; *idem*, *Das Christentum und die christliche Kirche der drei ersten Jahrhunderte* (Tübingen: Ludwig Friedrich Fues, 1860) 174; H.-J. Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity: Factional Disputes in the Early Church* (trans. D. R. A. Hare; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 108; Painter, *Just James*, 229; G. Lüdemann, *Heretics: The Other Side of Early Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996) 52-3; M. D. Goulder, *St. Paul versus St. Peter: A Tale of Two Missions* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 134.

43 *Haer.* 1.26.2; 3.11.7.

44 *Haer.* 7.34.1-2; 10.22.

45 *Praescr.* 30.11.

46 *Cels.* 2.1; 5.65; *Hom. Gen.* 3.5; *Hom. Jer.* 19.12.2; *Hom. Luc.* 17; *In epist. ad Titum; Comm. in Matt.* 79; *Princ.* 4.3.8.

47 *Hist. eccl.* 3.27.1-6; 6.17.

48 *Pan.* 30.16.7; 3.2-6; 18.4-5.

49 Origen, *Princ.* 4.22; *Cels.* 2.1; *Hom. Gen.* 3.5; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.27; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.17.

whether the Church Fathers are reliable sources. The term may not refer to a monolithic group but rather to several diverse groups.⁵⁰

The problem is further complicated in that Ebionites may have been influenced by Cerinthus and the Elchasaites.⁵¹ The Elchasaites appear to have originated as a Jewish Christian movement in the early second century.⁵² We can be reasonably confident of Elchasai's Jewish Christian background because circumcision was presupposed,⁵³ Sabbath observance was affirmed,⁵⁴ and Elchasai directed prayer towards Jerusalem. Epiphanius reports that Elchasai combined this reverence for Jerusalem with criticism of animal sacrifice.⁵⁵ He states that Elchasai directed prayer towards Jerusalem, rejected meat-eating⁵⁶ and condemned sacrifices and the Temple.⁵⁷ If Epiphanius' report is consistent with the original contents of the *Book of Elchasai*,⁵⁸ this pushes back our earliest attestation of a Jewish Christian anti-sacrifice tradition to *ca.* 116–17 CE,⁵⁹ that is, within the timeframe of the composition of the books of the New Testament. Although the *Book of Elchasai* is known only from extant fragments preserved in the writings of Hippolytus (*Ref.* 9.13–17), Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 6.38) and Epiphanius (*Pan.* 19.1.5; 19.3.4), Hippolytus' citation warns the reader to beware of 'undertaking anything on the third day of the week, for when again three years of Emperor Trajan are completed, from the time he brought the Parthians under his rule, ... the war among the impious angels of the North breaks out. Thereby all impious kingdoms are

50 Mimouni, *Early Judaeo-Christianity*, 220–1.

51 J. A. Fitzmyer, 'The Qumran Scrolls, the Ebionites and their Literature', *TS* 16 (1955) 335–72.

52 W. Brandt, *Elchasai, ein Religionsstifter und sein Werk: Beiträge zur jüdischen, christlichen und allgemeinen Religionsgeschichte* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1912).

53 Hippolytus, *Ref.* 9.14.1; Pseudo-Clementine *Adjunction* 1.1; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 19.5.1; 30.17.5.

54 Hippolytus, *Ref.* 19.16.3.

55 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 19.3.5–7.

56 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 19.3.6; 53.1.4.

57 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 19.3.3–7.

58 F. S. Jones, 'The *Book of Elchasai* in its Relevance for Manichaean Institutions with a Supplement: The *Book of Elchasai* Reconstructed and Translated', *ARAM* 16 (2004) 179–215, at 200, argues that 'there is a solid, reliable kernel to Epiphanius' remarks' (based on the discovery of the manuscript containing Hippolytus' *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 4–10) because 'Hippolytus and Epiphanius strikingly agree verbatim in certain of their excerpts' but Epiphanius 'also has citations not found in Hippolytus ... it is virtually certain that he [Epiphanius] ... had access to the *Book* itself'. Accordingly, we can continue to search for reliable information in Epiphanius' report and not 'doubt Epiphanius's remarks without some substantial basis'.

59 G. P. Luttikhuisen, *The Revelation of Elchasai: Investigations into the Evidence for a Mesopotamian Jewish Apocalypse of the Second Century and its Reception by Judeo-Christian Propagandists* (TSAJ 8; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985). Jones, 'The *Book of Elchasai*', 212, describes the *Book* as 'a very early church order ... the first datable witness to Christianity in northern Mesopotamia', while the date itself 'hinges on the reference to Trajan's victory' (214).

troubled.⁶⁰ This reference makes it possible to propose that ‘the book was originally written in Aramaic ... in northern Mesopotamia during Trajan’s Parthian war of 114–117 CE’.⁶¹

3. An Ebionite Gospel?

The *Gospel of the Ebionites* can be dated between the middle and the end of the second century.⁶² It seems to have been written in Greek, related to Matthew and Luke,⁶³ and perhaps composed in Syria.⁶⁴ There are eight fragmentary passages contained in Epiphanius’ *Panarion*.⁶⁵ The title *Gospel of the Ebionites* is, of course, a modern scholarly construct which would be more accurately (although admittedly more laboriously) described as ‘The Gospel (of Matthew) used by Ebionites (Ἐβιωνᾶῖοι) which they call “according to the Hebrews” (κατὰ Ἑβραίουσ)’.⁶⁶ Irenaeus’ account also supports the existence of a ‘gospel’ used by Ebionites in the late second century. Irenaeus’ Ebionites used a version of Matthew. Epiphanius’ quotations also appear to depend on Matthew and Luke,⁶⁷ although Epiphanius calls this ‘*Gospel of the Ebionites*’ a corruption of Matthew and a ‘Hebrew gospel’.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, both Irenaeus and Epiphanius claim that the Ebionites used a version of Matthew (εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Ματθαίου). The title, again, is derived from Epiphanius’ claim that Ebionites used a ‘forged and mutilated’ (νενοθευμένω καὶ ἡκρωτηριασμένω) version of Matthew.⁶⁹ Epiphanius reports that the ‘Nazoreans’ also used the Gospel of

60 G. P. Luttikhuisen, ‘The Book of Elchasai: A Jewish Apocalypse’, *Aula Orientalis* 5 (1987) 103.

61 Luttikhuisen, ‘The Book of Elchasai’, 101; Luomanen, *Recovering*, 42.

62 Bauckham, ‘The Origin of the Ebionites’, 163: there is ‘good reason to think that this Gospel of the Ebionites was used by the Ebionites of whom Irenaeus knew’. Mimouni (*Early Judaeo-Christianity*, 223) dates it ‘between the year ca 100 and the year ca 135’.

63 As a post-Synoptic harmony, see D. A. Bertrand, ‘L’Évangile des Ebionites: une harmonie évangélique antérieure au Diatessaron’, *NTS* 26 (1980) 548–63, at 550–1, 562; W. L. Petersen, ‘From Justin to Peps: The History of the Harmonised Gospel Tradition’, *StPatr* 30 (1997) 71–6, at 73. See also M.-E. Boismard, ‘Évangile des Ebionites et problème synoptique (Mc 1, 2-6 and par.)’, *RB* 73 (1966) 321–52; G. Howard, ‘The Gospel of the Ebionites’, *ANRW* 2.25.5 (1988) 4034–53; P. Vielhauer and G. Strecker, ‘The Gospel of the Ebionites’, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1 (ed. W. Schneemelcher; Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1991) 167–8.

64 Mimouni, *Early Judaeo-Christianity*, 223.

65 *Pan.* 30.13.1–8; 30.14.5; 30.16.4–5; 30.22.4.

66 *Pan.* 30.3.7; 30.16.5.

67 A. Gregory, ‘Prior or Posterior? *The Gospel of the Ebionites* and the Gospel of Luke’, *NTS* 51 (2005) 344–60; Bertrand, ‘L’Évangile des Ébionites’, 548–63. But see J. R. Edwards, ‘The Gospel of the Ebionites and the Gospel of Luke’, *NTS* 48 (2002) 568–86; C.-B. Amphoux, ‘L’Évangile selon les Hébreux: Source de L’Évangile de Luc’, *Apocrypha* 6 (1995) 67–77.

68 *Pan.* 13.2–3.

69 See Koch, ‘A Critical Investigation of Epiphanius’ Knowledge of the Ebionites’, 316–58; Mimouni, *Le judéo-christianisme ancien*, 258–72; Bauckham, ‘The Origin of the Ebionites’, 172.

Matthew in Hebrew (29.9.4). When Epiphanius turns his attention to the Ebionites, he first focuses on ‘Ebion’, the ‘founder’ of the Ebionites (*Pan.* 30.1.1). This ‘Ebion’ is allegedly both a ‘Samaritan’ (30.1.5) and a ‘Jew’, as well as an opponent of the Jews. Epiphanius then identifies the ‘sect’ in question (30.2.6) as a post-70 CE group (30.2.7) originating in Pella, although ‘Ebion’ first lived in a village called Cochabe in Bashanitis (30.2.8), which is where the Nazoareans came from as well. According to Epiphanius, the Ebionites were also ‘joined by Elchasai’ (30.3.2). Epiphanius thus essentially links three heretical Jewish Christian groups in genealogical relationship: Nazoareans, Ebionites and Elchasaite.

One of Epiphanius’ major concerns in this discussion seems to be his objection to what he takes to be an Ebionite rejection of Jesus’ divine incarnation, claiming that this heresy holds to Jesus’ natural birth by Joseph (*Pan.* 30.3.1; 30.13.7–8; 30.14.4). Epiphanius’ first citation from this ‘gospel’ is an objection to its alleged *denial* of Jesus’ humanity in a scene probably taken from the Synoptics where Jesus redefines his ‘family’ as those who do the will of God.⁷⁰ Epiphanius thus seems engaged in refuting two apparently contradictory Ebionite idea(s): that Jesus was either a naturally born human being and/or not human at all.

Epiphanius reports, on two occasions, that the Ebionite gospel began with John’s appearance at the Jordan:

Ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρῴδου βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐπὶ ἀρχιερέως Καϊάφα, ἦλθεν τις Ἰωάννης ὀνόματι βαπτίζων βάπτισμα μετανοίας ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ ὃς ἐλέγετο εἶναι ἐκ γένους Ἀαρὼν τοῦ ἱερέως, παῖς Ζαχαρίου καὶ Ἐλισάβετ, καὶ ἐξήρχοντο πρὸς αὐτὸν πάντες.

It happened in the days of Herod the king of Judea (at the time when Caiaphas was high priest) that a certain John came, baptizing the baptism of conversion in the river Jordan. Of him it is said that he was from the family of Aaron the priest, the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth. And all went out to him.⁷¹

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the relationship between the *Gospel of the Ebionites* and the Gospel of Luke is a *literary* one:

Luke 1.5 Ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρῴδου βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας

GosEb apud Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.13.6: Ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρῴδου βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας.

For Epiphanius, these opening lines ‘falsify the genealogical tables in Matthew’s Gospel’ (*Pan.* 30.14.3). Moreover, they appear to be ‘a conflation and abbreviation

⁷⁰ *Pan.* 30.14.5; cf. Luke 8.20, 21; Matt 12.47, 49, 50; Mark 3.33. Epiphanius claims that here ‘again they deny that he is a man, supposedly on the basis of the words the Saviour spoke when he was told, “Behold your mother and your brother stand outside”’ (*Pan.* 30.14.5).

⁷¹ *Pan.* 30.13.6, cited in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 179–81 (cf. 30.14.3).

of Luke 1.5 and 3.1–3', confusing two Herods: Herod the Great and Herod Antipas.⁷² The gospel's reference to John's priestly descent also draws on Luke 1.5, as does its use of the names of his parents, 'Zacharias' and 'Elisabeth'. Luke's reference to Jesus' age in 3.23 comes immediately after his account of Jesus' baptism. On the other hand, Epiphanius' βαπτίζων is Markan and the phrase 'all were going out to him' (καὶ ἐξήρχοντο πρὸς αὐτὸν πάντες) also comes from Mark 1.5. This alternating dependency on Mark, Matthew and Luke is also conspicuous in Epiphanius' fourth and fifth fragments on Jesus' baptism, a passage which features an *additional* pronouncement of Jesus' sonship (ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε; cf. Ps 2.7), a citation found only in Luke 3.22, accompanying σύ μου εἶ ὁ υἱὸς ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ ηὐδόκησα (Matt 3.17), as if to emphasise Jesus' identification as the 'son' specifically at his baptism.

If refuting Jesus' natural human birth is one of Epiphanius' goals, another is refuting Ebionite views on John the Baptist's and Jesus' dietary habits and attitudes toward sacrifice. Epiphanius cites John's appearance in the gospel:

καὶ ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων, καὶ ἐξῆλθον πρὸς αὐτὸν φαρισαῖοι καὶ ἐβαπτίσθησαν καὶ πᾶσα Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ εἶχεν ὁ Ἰωάννης ἔνδυμα ἀπὸ τριχῶν καμήλου καὶ ζώνην δερματίνην περὶ τὴν ὀσφύν αὐτοῦ. καὶ τὸ βρῶμα αὐτοῦ, φησί, μέλι ἄγριον, οὐ ἢ γεῦσις ἢ τοῦ μάννα, ὡς ἐγκρίς ἐν ἐλαίῳ.

It happened that John baptized and the Pharisees went out to him and were baptized and all Jerusalem. And John was dressed in a mantle of camel's hair and a leather belt was round his waist. And his food was, it says, wild honey, of which the taste was that of manna, like cakes in olive oil.⁷³

Here Epiphanius' editorial comments are illustrative, for he complains that 'they say this to turn the word of truth into a lie and they say honey-cakes (ἐγκρίδα ἐν μέλιτι) instead of locusts (ἀντὶ ἀκρίδων)'.⁷⁴ The Ebionite gospel portrayed John the Baptist as eating only vegetarian food (*Pan.* 30.13.4–5) and Jesus as refusing to eat the Passover lamb (30.22.1–3).⁷⁵ Epiphanius disapprovingly reports that the Ebionites are vegetarian (30.15.3–4).⁷⁶ He claims that the Ebionites deliberately try to 'destroy' the Gospel's 'true passage' by having Jesus say that he does 'not earnestly desire to eat meat' (30.22.4–5; cf. Luke 22.15), arguing that they are

72 Gregory, 'Prior or Posterior?', 349.

73 *Pan.* 30.13.4, cited in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 178–9.

74 *Pan.* 30.13.5, cited in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 178–9.

75 On John's diet, see J. A. Kelhoffer, *The Diet of John the Baptist: 'Locusts and Wild Honey' in Synoptic and Patristic Interpretation* (WUNT 176; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

76 Epiphanius claims that Ebionites abstained from animal meat 'because it is the product of the intercourse of the mixing of bodies' (*Pan.* 30.15.4), cited in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 183.

guilty of ‘tampering’ with the text in adding μή to the passage’s original reading of ἐπιθυμία ἐπεθύμησα (30.22.5). Epiphanius reminds his readers that ‘[t]he Passover (Πάσχα) consists ... of meat (κρέα) roasted in fire’,⁷⁷ but claims that ‘they made him [Jesus] answer: “I did *not* earnestly desire to eat meat (κρέας) with you this Passover (Πάσχα)’.⁷⁸ The author of the Ebionite gospel was aware that the Passover meal consisted of lamb, but solved the problem by having Jesus *deny* that he desired to eat ‘meat’ (κρέας). While the author could have represented Jesus as refusing to eat meat ‘*this* Passover’ only (thus having no previous or principled objections to meat-eating in general), there is no indication in the text that this was a temporary vow and/or that Jesus would resume eating meat once the kingdom arrived (cf. Luke 22.16). Consequently, there is no reason to doubt that the Ebionite gospel implicitly affirms a vegetarian Jesus, especially given that this Jesus has ‘come to abolish sacrifices’.”

The seventh fragment of the gospel represents this most distinctive and controversial feature: Jesus’ rejection of animal sacrifice. Epiphanius reports the Ebionite claim that Jesus ‘came and instructed us to abolish the sacrifices’ (*Pan.* 30.16.4). He appears to cite the text directly, as ‘their so-called gospel says’:

ἦλθον καταλῦσαι τὰς θυσίας, καὶ ἐὰν μὴ παύσησθε τοῦ θύειν οὐ
παύσεται ἅψ’ ὑμῶν ἡ ὀργή.

I have come to abolish sacrifices and if you do not stop sacrificing the wrath will not cease from you.⁷⁹

This passage certainly appears to be an indirect allusion to Matt 5.17–18:⁸⁰

Μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον καταλῦσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας, οὐκ ἦλθον
καταλῦσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι

Do *not* think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets, I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.

The use of ἦλθον καταλῦσαι in Matt 5.17 and a similar ἦλθον καταλῦσαι construction in the *Gospel of the Ebionites* suggests literary dependence. In the canonical Gospels, the ‘I have come’ sayings are widely regarded as secondary traditions summarising the *purpose* of Jesus’ mission.⁸¹

77 *Pan.* 30.22.3, cited in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 188–9.

78 *Pan.* 30.22.4, cited in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 188–9.

79 *Pan.* 30.16.4–5, cited in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 182–3.

80 Edwards, ‘The Gospel of the Ebionites and the Gospel of Luke’, 579.

81 G. Theissen and A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (trans. J. Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 525. See E. Arens, *The HAΘON-Sayings in the Synoptic Tradition* (OBO 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976). On the Synoptic ‘I have

I have come to hurl fire on the earth, and how I wish it was already blazed up.⁸²

Do you think that *I have come* to hurl peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!⁸³

For *I have come* to divide son against father, and daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.⁸⁴

Jesus said, 'Perhaps people think that *I have come* to cast peace upon the world. They do not know that *I have come* to cast conflicts upon the earth: fire, sword, war.'⁸⁵

The fact that the *Gospel of the Ebionites* uses this traditional christological formula further suggests that this saying is a secondary development. It is theoretically possible, as Hans Dieter Betz suggests, that a saying like Matt 5.17 ('Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law') is responding to an earlier anti-sacrificial saying-tradition,⁸⁶ but it seems more likely that Matthew is responding to general antinomian impressions in the early Jesus movement. And while some New Testament scholars are willing to consider the possibility that this 'Ebionite' tradition 'originated at a time when the temple still stood', we simply 'do not have the wider context to show whether the author sees Jesus condemning sacrifices as no longer valid or as never having been valid'.⁸⁷

What then to make of this enigmatic 'text?' The saying against animal sacrifice clearly represents a *non*-Synoptic tradition, but this tradition cannot be dated simply by appealing to *post*-Synoptic sayings.⁸⁸ We cannot a priori rule out the possibility that a *non*-Synoptic text uses *pre*-Synoptic sources and/or traditions.

Does the *Gospel of the Ebionites* represent a post-Synoptic Jewish Christian harmonising gospel?⁸⁹ Or does it reflect an independent tradition *preceding* the Synoptics? Although the gospel may have drawn on a post-Synoptic 'harmony', it does not actually attempt to 'harmonise' disparate gospel accounts, but

come' sayings, see also Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 83–189.

82 Luke 12.49.

83 Luke 12.51.

84 Matt 10.35.

85 Thomas L. 16, cited in J. S. Kloppenborg, M. W. Meyer, S. J. Patterson and M. G. Steinhauser, *Q Thomas Reader* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1990) 133.

86 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 175–6.

87 W. R. G. Loader, *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 507, 516.

88 Edwards, 'The Gospel of the Ebionites and the Gospel of Luke', 584.

89 Mimouni, *Early Judaeo-Christianity*, 224 proposes that the *Gospel of the Ebionites* and the Synoptics 'have drawn on a common tradition (oral or written)'.

rather represents them in light of its own distinctive Christology and soteriology. It is theoretically possible that a 'living' *second-century* oral 'gospel' tradition could have influenced and informed this composition.⁹⁰ Alternatively, James Edwards has suggested that the gospel represents a Greek translation of a 'Hebrew Gospel' described by the early Church Fathers and used by Luke.⁹¹ Edwards appeals to Papias' statement that 'Matthew collected the oracles (τὰ λόγια) in the Hebrew language' and that 'others' translated them as best they could,⁹² suggesting that the literary relationships between the *Gospel of the Ebionites* and the Synoptics do not 'indicate which document influenced the other'.⁹³

In response, Andrew Gregory concedes that neither Klijn nor Bertrand – two scholars who identify the *Gospel of the Ebionites* as a post-Synoptic harmony⁹⁴ – actually 'demonstrates why the parallels demand (rather than merely suggest) that the nature of the relationship is one of the dependence of the *Gospel of the Ebionites* on the synoptic tradition'. Rather, those who have argued for the dependence of the gospel on the Synoptics have not 'established their case on a methodologically rigorous basis', but have drawn on inference and assumptions of directionality of influence. In an attempt to rectify this omission, Gregory argues that Lukan and Matthean redaction of Mark can be identified in the gospel's account of Jesus' baptism: Lukan in its use of 'people' (λαοῦ) (*Pan.* 30.13.7; cf. Luke 3.21; Mark 1.5); Matthean in the conversation between Jesus and John.⁹⁵ Consequently, there is 'a strong *prima facie* case that we have here an early witness to the texts of Matthew and of Luke'. It thus 'seems easier to believe that the *Gospel of the Ebionites* drew on the Synoptic Gospels than vice versa'.⁹⁶ For Gregory, the *Gospel of the Ebionites* derives from 'a harmony of the three Synoptic Gospels which included both narrative and sayings material',⁹⁷

90 J. Becker, *Mündliche und schriftliche Autorität im frühen Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

91 Edwards, 'The Gospel of the Ebionites and the Gospel of Luke', 584. See also J. R. Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). For criticism, see P. Foster, Review of Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel*, *ExpT* 121.9 (2010) 454–5.

92 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.16. Although see A. F. J. Klijn, 'Patristic Evidence for Jewish Christian and Aramaic Gospel Tradition', *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black* (ed. E. Best and R. McL. Wilson; Cambridge University Press, 1979) 169–77.

93 Edwards, 'The Gospel of the Ebionites and the Gospel of Luke', 582.

94 A. F. J. Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition* (VC Sup 17; Leiden: Brill, 1992); Bertrand, 'L'Évangile'.

95 Gregory, 'Prior or Posterior?', 353–4.

96 Gregory, 'Prior or Posterior?', 349. See also A. Gregory, *The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period before Irenaeus: Looking for Luke in the Second Century* (WUNT 11/169; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 92–103.

97 Gregory, *Reception*, 93.

especially since the gospel contains ‘details known otherwise only from *Luke*, and it is likely that these include at least some Lukan redaction’.⁹⁸ Accordingly, the idea that ‘the *Gospel of the Ebionites* is posterior rather than prior to *Luke*, and probably also to *Matthew* and to *Mark*, seems beyond dispute’.⁹⁹

The problem, of course, is that even if the *Gospel of the Ebionites* adapts and develops passages from a post-Synoptic text, this does not explain the origin of its *non*-Synoptic traditions. Gregory rightly admits that ‘the presence of non-synoptic material does allow the possibility that even material similar to the synoptic tradition need not depend on the Synoptic Gospels’. For example, Gregory argues that the *Gospel of the Ebionites*’ account of Jesus’ baptism ‘witnesses to an early form of the synoptic tradition prior to that found in the later manuscript tradition of the Synoptic Gospels’. He also recognises that the anti-sacrificial saying (*Pan.* 30.16.5) has ‘no immediate parallel to the synoptic tradition’.¹⁰⁰ Jesus’ saying against animal sacrifice represents an independent, *non*-Synoptic tradition which cannot be dated simply by appealing to other *post*-Synoptic redactions. In short, we still cannot rule out the possibility that the *Gospel of the Ebionites* uses *pre*-Synoptic sources and traditions.¹⁰¹

Identifying the *Gospel of the Ebionites* as a post-Synoptic text largely derivative of or dependent on the Synoptic Gospels does not mean our work here is done. The likelihood that our Ebionite gospel represents a post-Synoptic *text* does not mean that the *tradition* itself is post-Synoptic. This tradition-history question can only be resolved by working through the *historical*, *literary* and *theological* traditions of that tradition. Here the problems are legion. Yet given the fact that the sacrificial interpretation of Jesus’ death is a major theme in the New Testament, it is a priori unlikely that we would find any explicit references to theologies that undermine that very same theme in the canon. Jesus’ *first* Jewish followers in Jerusalem may not have shared *every* aspect of Paul’s interpretation of ‘the Gospel’,¹⁰² and *later* Jewish Christians almost certainly did not, but once Jesus’ death was ‘remembered’ as a sacrifice, this ‘memory’ was *inscribed* in the Gospels and the canonical construction of Jesus’ death as a sacrifice displaced and marginalised any rival ‘memories’ of Jesus. Jesus’ death was interpreted within a salvation-history that saw his blood as spilled for the ‘new covenant’.¹⁰³ Paul seems to be our earliest *evidence* of this identification of Jesus as a sacrifice

98 Gregory, *Reception*, 92.

99 Gregory, ‘Prior or Posterior?’, 357, 360.

100 Gregory, *Reception*, 93 n. 178.

101 Gregory, *Reception*, 99.

102 J. S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 379: ‘Q’s approach to these issues is significantly different from those of Paul (and his immediate predecessors) and the Markan and post-Markan gospels’ (emphasis added).

103 Rom 3.25–6.

'for our sins',¹⁰⁴ but the Gospels echo this theme, affirming Jesus' identity as the suffering son of man/messiah who must die as a sacrifice 'for many' (Mark 10.45; 14.24). Since Jesus is portrayed as an *efficacious* blood sacrifice, it is unlikely that a saying or tradition portraying Jesus as *rejecting* or criticising blood sacrifice would make it into the canon. It would not have served the theological interests of the evangelists to portray Jesus as rejecting animal sacrifice. An explicit rejection of animal sacrifice *in principle* would thus seem to be incompatible with the sacrificial soteriology inscribed in the New Testament writings. The idea that Jesus' death substituted for or replaced the Temple's sacrificial system may have only come to full expression in the Epistle to the Hebrews, but the seeds of this idea are present already in the letters of Paul.

It is certainly possible that early Jewish Christians continued participating in the Temple cult because they saw nothing particularly incompatible about affirming Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice while continuing to offer *non*-expiatory offerings.¹⁰⁵ On this model, Jesus' first followers only stopped practising animal sacrifice in Jerusalem when the Temple was destroyed. If this was the case, then the Jewish Christian rejection of animal sacrifice could essentially be 'harmonised' with traditional Christian theology by assuming that Jewish Christians *also* identified Jesus' death as a blood sacrifice that replaced or complemented the need for the Temple cult.¹⁰⁶ One could then represent the Jewish Christian rejection of animal sacrifice as a late, post-70 CE *apologia* for the destruction of the Temple. This view holds that the historical Jesus and the earliest Jewish Christians piously practised animal sacrifice in Jerusalem until the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, after which they retrospectively concluded that this particular aspect of the Mosaic Torah was now moot or redundant because Jesus' death represented the ultimate efficacious sacrifice.

The New Testament writings do not explicitly present Jesus or early Christians performing acts of animal sacrifice, but there are a number of passages which certainly give the impression that they did so. The Gospel of Mark, for example, has Jesus celebrating the Passover festival in Jerusalem, which traditionally involved eating the sacrificial Passover lamb, but the Gospel never actually mentions a 'lamb' (ἀρνίον). It may be implied by πάσχα (Mark 14.12), but Jesus is *also* implied as the symbolic lamb of the 'new covenant', shedding his sacrificial blood 'for many' (Mark 10.45; 14.24). It is commonly assumed that Jesus celebrated Passover by sacrificing in the Temple (if only by proxy) and eating the Passover lamb, but it is nonetheless difficult to see how he could both *eat* the

104 1 Cor 15.3; Rom 5.6, 8; 14.9; 2 Cor 5.14, 15; Gal 2.21; 1 Thess 5.10.

105 S. M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions of Judgement and Restoration* (SNTSMS 117; Cambridge University Press, 2002) 234.

106 B. D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012⁵) 3.

Passover lamb and simultaneously identify himself *as* the 'new' Passover lamb. That may be why the Gospels never actually portray Jesus as *eating* the Passover 'lamb', but this apparent omission also justifies *not* identifying the Last Supper as a Passover meal, which is, of course, how the Gospel of John represents it.¹⁰⁷ The Gospel of Matthew portrays Jesus as giving advice on 'offering gifts' at the 'altar' (Matt 5.23-4), but never refers to animal sacrifice. The Lukan Jesus calls the Temple his 'Father's house' (Luke 2.49), but he also laments its fate as 'forsaken' (ἀφίετοι) (13.35). The book of Acts suggests that early Jewish Christians prayed and taught in the Temple (Acts 2.46; 3.1; 5.21, 42), but never mentions animal sacrifices, and Stephen criticises the Temple as 'made by human hands'. Acts portrays Paul as *sponsoring* a Nazirite vow, which would have required an animal sacrifice, but he does not seem to have completed the task. The author tells us that Paul, 'having purified himself, entered the Temple with them, making public the completion of the days of purification when the sacrifice *would* be made for each of them' (Acts 21.26). Moreover, Nazirite vows typically lasted thirty days, not seven (*m. Naz.* 1.3; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.15.1), although the period of *purification* was seven days (*m. Naz.* 7.3; *b. Naz.* 54b). In this case, it would seem that 'it was only Luke who made Paul a Nazirite'.¹⁰⁸ We might also recall that Paul never describes himself as performing any acts of animal sacrifice in his letters. Considering these literary, historical and theological ambiguities, it seems prudent not to *assume* that all early (Judean/Palestinian) Jewish Christians practised animal sacrifice, especially since early conflicts over the ongoing validity of Jewish ritual law, Jewish/Gentile table fellowship, meat sacrificed to idols, the question of whether 'all foods' were clean, as well as the ongoing validity of the Temple cult, seem to run under the surface as sub-text within the gospel narratives. The New Testament authors were content to leave this ambiguity intact, giving exegetes the general impression that neither Jesus nor his first Jewish followers objected to the practice even though Jesus is simultaneously portrayed as 'predicting' the Temple's destruction.

That is not how the *Gospel of the Ebionites* and the Pseudo-Clementines portray the Jewish Christian Jesus' rejection of animal sacrifice. These traditions combine the rejection of animal sacrifice with the rejection of meat-eating. The *Gospel of the Ebionites* portrays John the Baptist as a vegetarian and Jesus refuses to eat the Passover (lamb). These traditions also contain polemical discourses rejecting animal sacrifice on principle as contrary to God's will at creation. This distinctive Jewish Christian approach represents a *different discourse* on sacrifice in early Christianity and urges us to reconsider how different images of Jesus

107 On Jesus' death remembered 'around Passover', see H. K. Bond, 'Dating the Death of Jesus: Memory and the Religious Imagination', *NTS* 59 (2013) 461-75.

108 Myllykoski, 'James the Just in History and Tradition', 17-19.

in non-canonical sources may continue to shed light on the reception of the New Testament Gospels throughout late antiquity.¹⁰⁹

The anti-animal sacrifice traditions in the *Gospel of the Ebionites*, *Rec.* 1.27–71, the *Grundschrift*, *Recognitions* and *Homilies* represent a multiply attested interpretive lens through which a number of Jewish Christians ‘remembered’ Jesus.¹¹⁰ Early second-century Jewish Christians attempted to *correct* what they saw as a misrepresentation of Christian origins by composing counter-narratives to the Gospels and the book of Acts.¹¹¹ Whether or not this tradition goes back to the historical Jesus and/or *early Jewish Christianity*¹¹² – a question which represents a complex of historical issues which cannot be addressed here, but warrant further investigation – the Jewish Christian Jesus’ rejection of blood sacrifice was problematic for an early church which viewed his death *as* a blood sacrifice.¹¹³ The idea that Jesus criticised animal sacrifice was scandalous to those Jews and Christians for whom sacrifice continued to serve as the central core of their traditions. For rabbinical Jews, the sacrificial system was symbolically reinscribed in the Mishnah; for ‘proto-orthodox’ Christians, the Jesus of the Gospels does not ‘abolish’ the Mosaic Torah; he fulfils it. Jesus does not just symbolically destroy the Temple; he *replaces* it with his own body, death and people, essentially transferring its efficacious power from Judaism to Christianity. The New Testament, in its affirmation, canonisation, inscription and authorisation of sacrificial soteriology – and marginalisation of ‘heretical’ challenges and counter-narratives – effectively ensured that Christianity would become a religion centred on, and ultimately defined by, sacrifice.¹¹⁴

4. Conclusion

The *Gospel of the Ebionites* is a ‘text’ cited by Epiphanius in eight fragmentary passages (*Pan.* 30), yet it is also one of a number of second-, third- and fourth-

109 The *Epistle of Barnabas* (ca. 130 CE), with its overtly supersessionist and allegorical readings of Mosaic Law, is yet another direction Christian discourse on sacrifice could take.

110 H. J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1949) 241 proposes an early Jewish Christian/Ebionite antipathy towards the Temple.

111 B. F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979) 71; M. Goodacre, *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze* (London: T&T Clark, 2001) 25.

112 Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity*, 74–5. O. Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 2002) 156: ‘the view of the sacrifices held by the author of *Recognitions* 1.27–71 ... does not differ radically ... from that of the pre-70 Jerusalem community’. See also L. Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (NovTSup 23; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 240–1.

113 Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, 76.

114 G. G. Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity* (trans. S. Emanuel; University of Chicago Press, 2009) 72.

century Jewish Christian traditions alleging that Jesus rejected animal sacrifice. Epiphanius' citations strongly suggest that he is quoting from an actual literary work that developed Synoptic narrative elements in different directions from the canonical depictions of Jesus' ministry. The anti-sacrificial saying recorded in *Pan.* 30.16.5, in particular, is a non-Synoptic tradition based on a formulaic Greek literary construction (an ἦλθον saying) found in other Synoptic passages. The saying may not be a genuine saying of the Jesus of history, but the distinctive tradition behind it represents an ideological position reminiscent of Jewish Christian sources. In this article, I have sought to explore this text and tradition's significance as a case study in the use of non-canonical gospel traditions in New Testament studies. While it seems virtually certain that the *Gospel of the Ebionites* is literarily dependent on the Synoptic Gospels, it also contains *non*-Synoptic traditions which represent a different discourse on Jesus' identity and his relationship to the Temple cult and the Mosaic Torah, raising questions still at the very centre of contemporary discourse on the historical Jesus and the relationship between Early Judaism and nascent Christianity.