

## JEWISH VERSIONS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW: OBSERVATIONS ON THREE RECENT PUBLICATIONS

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When people think of Jewish Gospels outside the New Testament the *Gospels of the Hebrews*, *Nazarenes*, and *Ebionites* immediately come to mind. All that remains of these Gospels are quotations, excerpts, or summaries, usually quite brief, found in the writings of the Fathers of the Christian Church.<sup>1</sup> The best attested of the three (*Nazarenes*) is clearly related to the Gospel of Matthew and is perhaps a recension of it. The other two Jewish Gospels also appear to be related, in varying degrees, to Matthew, the New Testament Gospel that influenced the Church more than any other Gospel.<sup>2</sup> That these Jewish Gospels are closely related to Matthew, and in one or two instances are probably versions of it, should occasion no surprise, for Matthew itself is a product of Jewish messianism. Recent studies have rightly recognized this important dimension.<sup>3</sup>

Scholarly discussion of the origins, beliefs, and experience of the Jewish community that believed in Jesus has relied heavily on the remains of the

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<sup>1</sup> For convenient collections and translations of these Gospels, see W. Schneemelcher (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha. Volume One: Gospels and Related Writings* (rev. ed., Cambridge: James Clarke; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991) 134-78; J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation based on M. R. James* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 3-16.

<sup>2</sup> For substantial documentation of this observation, see É. Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus* (3 vols., *New Gospel Studies* 5.1-3; ed. A. J. Bellinzoni; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1990, 1992, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> J. A. Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); A. J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994); D. C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998). The Gospel of Matthew has been traditionally viewed as the most Jewish of the four New Testament Gospels. Whereas the Jewish authorship of Mark and John is disputed, almost everyone agrees that the Matthean Gospel was composed by a Jew.

three Jewish Gospels and what the Christian Fathers say about them.<sup>4</sup> The importance of these partly preserved Gospels must not be underestimated. However, what has gone largely unnoticed in the last decade or two is the publication of two versions of the Gospel of Matthew—one in Hebrew and another in Coptic—versions that appear to have circulated among Jewish messianic congregations well after the more familiar version of Greek Matthew had become the standard Gospel of a Church that had become predominantly non-Jewish. Yet a third publication, in which a scholar from Harvard has recently revisited a Gospel fragment published almost one hundred years ago, has raised once again the possibility that an old papyrus—possibly also related to Matthew or *Nazarenes*—circulated among Jews who believed in Jesus as Israel’s Messiah.

It will be worthwhile to review these lesser known texts, for their importance for appreciating afresh the Jewish context of the Jesus movement and some of its earliest writings that proclaimed the message and mishnah of its founder must not be overlooked. While we may not be able to show that these texts reach back to the first century, perhaps antedating the New Testament Gospels themselves, and perhaps attesting authentic Jesus tradition, nevertheless, the light they potentially shed on Jewish messianism in the second, third, and fourth centuries fully justifies their careful study.

#### HEBREW MATTHEW

The complete text of Matthew in Hebrew is preserved in a lengthy, polemical treatise composed in the fourteenth century by Shem Tob ben Isaac (sometimes called Ibn Shaprut). Shem Tob’s purpose was to refute the Christian Gospel story, point by point. Although disputed, Shem Tob may actually preserve an independent textual tradition of Matthew, possibly related to a “Gospel in Hebrew letters,” mentioned by the second-century church father Papias. If so, what does it tell us about the Jewish believers who preserved it? Many readings cohere with early Greek witnesses, many

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<sup>4</sup> For a representative sampling, see F. J. A. Hort, *Judaistic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish-Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964); H. J. Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969); F. Manns, *Essais sur le Judéo-Christianisme* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1977); R. A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (SPB 37; Leiden: Brill, 1988); A. F. J. Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition* (VCSup 17; Leiden: Brill, 1992); J. N. B. Carleton Paget, “Jewish Christianity,” in W. Horbury et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*. Volume Three: *The Early Roman Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 731-75.

are independent, and it has been shown that Shem Tob's Hebrew Matthew is based upon neither the Vulgate nor Byzantine Greek, which, if it had been translated in the fourteenth century, it would have been. It is an important witness to a much earlier tradition, possibly one that is in some way related to a Hebrew version of Matthew that early Church Fathers discuss.

What has just been said summarizes some of the principal arguments offered by George Howard, who in 1987 published the text of Hebrew Matthew, along with an English translation, introduction, and critical discussion. A revised edition appeared in 1995.<sup>5</sup> Although not all reviewers were persuaded by Howard, leading authorities in the study of early Judaism and Christianity, such as William Horbury and Daniel Harrington,<sup>6</sup> agree with some of Howard's conclusions, thinking that Shem Tob's Hebrew Matthew is more than merely a medieval Hebrew translation of either Greek Matthew or Latin Matthew.<sup>7</sup>

At important points Hebrew Matthew appears to reflect Jewish interests. We see this in what seems to be a higher regard for Torah, the Law of Moses. According to Greek Matthew, "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress . . ." (5:31-32). When it comes to applying the divorce legislation of Deut 24:1-4, the halakah of Greek Jesus stands in tension with rabbinic halakah. Major rabbinic figures allowed a man to divorce his wife, if for no more cause than a spoiled dinner (cf. *m. Gittin* 9:10; *Sipre Deut.* §269 [on Deut 24:1]).<sup>8</sup> Not only does Jesus' stricter views on divorce stand in tension with the more lenient views of the rabbis, his halakah in Greek Matthew

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<sup>5</sup> G. Howard, *The Gospel of Matthew according to a Primitive Hebrew Text* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987); rev. ed., *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> D. J. Harrington, Review of G. Howard, *The Gospel of Matthew according to a Primitive Hebrew Text*, in *CBQ* 50 (1988) 717-18; W. Horbury, Review of Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, in *JJS* 47 (1996) 382-84; idem, "The Hebrew Text of Matthew in Shem Tob Ibn Shaprut's *Eben Bohan*," in D. C. Allison Jr. and W. D. Davies, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. Volume III: *Commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997) 729-38.

<sup>7</sup> For recent studies lending further support to Howard's thesis, see R. F. Shedding, "A Further Consideration of the Textual Nature of Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew," *CBQ* 61 (1999) 686-94; idem, "The Textual Relationship between P<sup>45</sup> and Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew," *NTS* 43 (1997) 58-71.

<sup>8</sup> That this halakah is indeed ancient, reaching back to the time of Jesus and earlier, is seen in Josephus (cf. *Ant.* 4.253; *Life* 426) and the sage Jesus ben Sira (cf. *Sir* 25:26).

seems even to stand in tension with written Torah itself. Not so in Hebrew Matthew, however; for it reads differently in a very important way: “. . . But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife *is to give her a certificate of divorce*. But concerning adultery, he is the one who commits adultery . . .” (emphasis added). Hebrew Matthew makes it clear that the law of Moses is to be followed. Moreover, the absence of the exception clause (cf. Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor 7:10), which scholars suspect may have been a later gloss, may support the antiquity of Hebrew Matthew.

We find another example here in the Sermon on the Mount. According to Greek Matthew, “Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not swear at all . . .” (5:33-34). But according to Hebrew Matthew, “Again you have heard that it was said to those of long ago, ‘You shall not swear *by my name* falsely, but you shall perform to the Lord your oath. But I say to you, Do not swear *in vain by anything* . . .” (emphasis added). Hebrew Matthew’s different reading is quite significant. Swearing is permissible (as it certainly is in the Law of Moses), but it is not to be done falsely, “by my name” (cf. Lev 19:12), or “in vain” (cf. Exod 20:7). In Hebrew Matthew there is no hint that laws pertaining to taking oaths have been abrogated. Once again, the halakah of Jesus in Hebrew Matthew is closer to the halakah of the rabbis.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing variants in Hebrew Matthew is found in an important saying held in common with Luke. According to Greek Matthew, “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (12:28 = Luke 11:20, except the latter reads “by the finger of God”). According to Hebrew Matthew, Jesus says, “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, truly the end of (his) kingdom has come.” Not only does this form of the saying fit its context more naturally, and not only is the ambiguous phrase “upon you” missing, the clause “the end of (Satan’s) kingdom has come” coheres dictionally and thematically with Jewish eschatology. This aspect is expressed clearly in the *Testament of Moses*, a book composed in Israel sometime in the first third of the first century C.E., that is, during Jesus’ lifetime and probably during his ministry. According to the eschatological vision of this work, “then his (God’s) kingdom will appear in his whole creation, and then the Devil will have an end” (*T. Mos.* 10:1). Hebrew Matthew seems to be saying the same thing: if Jesus is able by the Spirit of God to cast out demons, then indeed the kingdom of Satan is coming to an end (cf. Mark 3:26, lit. “If Satan . . . is divided . . . he has an end”). We need not argue that Hebrew Matthew preserves a form of the saying that is older, or more authentic, than that

found in Greek Matthew/Luke. But its form is consistent with Jewish eschatology of late antiquity and does not appear to represent a confused, medieval reading that may have emerged in the time of Shem Tob.

#### COPTIC MATTHEW

In 2001 Hans-Martin Schenke published the Coptic text of the Gospel of Matthew, as found in the Schøyen Collection (catalogue number MS 2650).<sup>9</sup> This papyrus codex dates to the first half of the fourth century, preserving most of Matt 5:38–28:20. It is written in the northern style of the Middle Egyptian dialect of Coptic.<sup>10</sup> Schenke has provided a description of the codex, including its paleography, orthography, language, and textform.<sup>11</sup> He offers a transcription of the Coptic text and a German translation.<sup>12</sup>

Because we have here a Coptic translation of a Greek version of Matthew we have to exercise great caution in our interpretation of the significance of different readings. After all, a different reading in Coptic Matthew may be due simply to translation, not to a difference in the Greek text that the Coptic translator had before him. Accordingly, we are advised to focus on differences that are not readily explained by the vicissitudes of translation.

There are in fact variant readings that may point to a Semitic/Jewish context in which the version of Matthew that underlies the Coptic text was preserved and studied. These Semitic readings are seen in theme and diction, including Aramaizing style. Frequently we encounter the familiar Aramaic locution to “speak before” someone (cf. 15:23; 16:20; 17:20; 23:27, 28; 26:74).<sup>13</sup> At 9:34 Coptic Matthew reads “by Belseboul.” The addition of the name of the prince of demons coheres with Shem Tob’s Hebrew Matthew that reads “by the name of the prince of demons.” Greek Matthew simply reads “by the prince of the demons.” The expression “one by one” at 10:10 is Semitic (cf. Mark 14:19). At 11:1 we have “synagogues” instead of “cities,” perhaps reflecting a Jewish setting. At 14:25 Coptic Matthew reads

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<sup>9</sup> H.-M. Schenke, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium im mittelägyptischen Dialekt des Koptischen (Codex Schøyen)* (Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection 2: Coptic Papyri 1; Oslo: Hermes, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Schenke, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Schenke, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium*, 17-34.

<sup>12</sup> Schenke, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium*, 35-191. Schenke provides an appendix (pp. 279-311), in which he retroverts the Coptic into the Greek that he thinks underlies the Coptic translation. This is followed by beautiful color plates (pp. 315-92), which are remarkably legible.

<sup>13</sup> This locution is quite common in Targums, that is, the Aramaic paraphrases of Tanak.

“upon the waters of the sea,” instead of “upon the sea.”<sup>14</sup> At 15:2 Coptic Matthew omits “transgress the tradition of the elders,” possibly reflecting a higher regard for rabbinic halakah (as seen in Hebrew Matthew above). Similarly, at 15:9 Coptic Matthew omits “in vain they honor me,” once again possibly reflecting Jewish concerns. At 19:29 Coptic Matthew’s addition of “wife” agrees with Shem Tob’s Hebrew Matthew. At 21:9 and 21:15 Coptic Matthew reads “in the house of David,” instead of “to the son of David.”<sup>15</sup> At 25:27b Coptic Matthew omits “with interest,” which again possibly reflects Jewish sensitivity—in that collecting interest is contrary to the Law (cf. Exod 22:25; Lev 25:36-37; Deut 23:19-20).

#### A FRAGMENT OF GREEK PARCHMENT

Document 840 from Oxyrhynchus was published in 1908 and touched off a firestorm of debate. It comprises a single page of parchment (not papyrus), with 22 lines of text on one side and 23 lines on the other. Its small size could suggest that it was an amulet. The fact that we have two stories, the conclusion of one in lines 1–7, and most of a second in lines 7–45, encourages us to view this parchment as a leaf from a codex, albeit a small one, whether or not it was used as an amulet.<sup>16</sup>

Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, the first to edit and publish the text, dated the leaf to the fourth century and argued that it was part of an extracanonical Gospel (probably composed in Egypt) and that the story itself probably originated before the end of the second century.<sup>17</sup> They further concluded that although this fragment seems to be Jewish, it probably is not part of one of the other Jewish Gospels (such as the *Gospel of the Nazarenes* or the *Gospel of the Ebionites*) nor is it a fragment of a Gnostic Gospel. Quite recently, Harvard professor François Bovon agrees, concluding that

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<sup>14</sup> The phrase “upon the waters of the sea” is Semitic, occurring some half dozen times in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Exod 15:19 “the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea”; Ps 33:7 “He gathered the waters of the sea”).

<sup>15</sup> Coptic Matthew’s reading “in the house of David” may reflect the influence of Ps 122:5 and/or *Tg.* Ps 132:17.

<sup>16</sup> Soon after the publication of POxy 840 E. Preuschen (“Das neue Evangelienfragment von Oxyrhynchos,” *ZNW* 9 [1908] 1-11, here 1-2), citing a passage from Chrysostom, wondered if the fragment was part of a tiny book worn around the neck in place of an amulet.

<sup>17</sup> B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, “Fragment of an Uncanonical Gospel,” in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 5 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1908) 1-10 + pl. I.

POxy 840 is not Jewish.<sup>18</sup> As will be shown, this conclusion should be reconsidered.

Beginning at line 7 of the *verso* and continuing to the end of the story, which breaks off with the poorly preserved final lines of the *recto*, we read:

And he took them and brought them into the very place of purification, and was walking in the Temple.

And approaching, a certain Pharisee, a ruling priest, whose name was Lev[i], met them and s[aid] to the Savior, “Who permitted you to wa[lk] in this place of purification and to see [the]se holy vessels, when you have not wash[ed] nor yet have your disciples [ba]thed their f[ee]t? But defil[ed] you have walked in this Temple, which is a pure pl[ace], in which no o[ther person] walks [unless] he has washed himself and cha[n]ged his cloth[es], neither does he [dare view these] holy vessels.”

And [the Savior immediately stoo]d (still) w[ith hi]s disciples and answered him, “Are you then, being here in the Temple, clean?”

He says to him, “I am clean, for I washed in the pool of D[avi]d, and having descended by one set of steps I ascended by another. And I put on white and clean clothes, and then I came and looked upon these holy vessels.”

An[swer]ing, the Savior said to him, “Woe you blind who do not see. You have washed in these running waters in which dogs and swine have [been] cast night and day, and have cleaned and wiped the outside skin which also the harlots and flute-girls anoi[nt] and wash and wipe [and b]eautify for the lus[t o]f men; but with[in they are f]ull of scorpions and [all wic]kedness. But I and [my disciples], who you say have not ba[thed, have been dip]ped in the waters [of eternal] li[fe whi]ch come from . . . [ . . . B]ut woe to the . . .

Bovon regards the priest’s description of ablution inauthentic of Jewish practice, but reflective instead of Christian baptism and controversy.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, recent investigation of POxy 840 and advances in archaeology in the land of Israel may be tipping the balance in favor of viewing the story as true to first-century Jewish practices, though not necessarily as deriving from an actual event in the life of Jesus. The alleged inaccuracies can in most instances be satisfactorily explained.

First, the excavation of several miqva’oth in the vicinity of the Temple precincts provides more than sufficient documentation of the general verisimilitude of the story itself.

Secondly, the issue surrounding the viewing of holy vessels has been

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<sup>18</sup> F. Bovon, “Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840, Fragment of a Lost Gospel, Witness of an Early Christian Controversy over Purity,” *JBL* 119 (2000) 705-28.

<sup>19</sup> Bovon, “Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840,” 716-21.

clarified in a recent study by Daniel Schwartz,<sup>20</sup> who cites incidents related in Josephus (cf. *J.W.* 1.152, where Pompey views the holy place; *Ant.* 14.71-72, where Pompey sees the golden table, sacred lampstand, libation vessels; *J.W.* 1.354 = *Ant.* 14.482-483, where Herod expresses fear that foreigners would gaze upon sacred objects), rabbinic traditions (cf. *t. Hag.* 3.35; *y. Hag.* 3.8, where Israelites are invited to see the Temple's menorah), and Scripture itself (cf. 1 Sam 6:19, where people die for looking into the ark of the covenant; Num 4:20, which warns that looking upon holy utensils will result in death). Schwartz concludes that POxy 840 may contain a genuine Jewish polemic directed against priestly arrogance and elitism.

Thirdly, ritual immersion was required for entry into the Court of the Israelites (cf. *m. Yoma* 3:3: "None may enter the Temple Court for service, even though he is clean, until he has immersed himself. On this day [i.e., the Day of Atonement] the High Priest five times immerses himself . . ."; see also *b. Yoma* 30b, which presupposes that priests immersed themselves before entering the Sanctuary; according to *b. Yoma* 30a, moving from a common place to a holy place "requires immersion"; and see Josephus, *J.W.* 5.227: "Men not thoroughly clean were debarred from admission into the inner court"; cf. *m. Kelim* 1:8). When immersed, Israelite men would have been permitted to enter the inner court, where sacred vessels, sometimes on display, could be viewed. It must be admitted that there is no evidence apart from POxy 840 that the laity were expected to change clothes as well as immerse themselves. But caution is required here, for "changed clothes" in lines 19 and 20 has to be restored. Moreover, we do not know that it was not required of the laity to immerse themselves and change their clothes on special occasions when sacred vessels were put on display.

Fourthly, the priest<sup>21</sup> claims that he has descended by one set of steps and ascended by another. Grenfell and Hunt think "the two stairways leading down" to the pool "seem to be details invented for the sake of rhetorical effect."<sup>22</sup> Rhetoric or not, divided steps that go *down into* and back *up from* the water are now attested in Jewish miqva'oth, including some of the

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<sup>20</sup> D. R. Schwartz, "'Viewing the Holy Utensils' (P. Ox. V, 840)," *NTS* 32 (1986) 153-59.

<sup>21</sup> Some have objected that there was no High Priest named Levi. This may be true, but the text probably means "a certain ruling priest," not "a certain High Priest." The use of *tis* implies one of the several ruling priests. We know of a captain of the priests who may have been a Pharisee (cf. *'Abot* 3:2; *m. 'Ed.* 2:1-2). In any case, "Pharisee" in POxy 840 may very well be a gloss. The original text probably read "a certain ruling priest named Levi."

<sup>22</sup> Grenfell and Hunt, "Fragment of an Uncanonical Gospel," 3.

miqvaoth in the vicinity of the Temple Mount itself.<sup>23</sup> Qumran offers a clear and interesting example, where the center divider is quite wide, perhaps reflecting Qumran's great concern over matters of purity. That Qumran, a priestly sect, used miqvaoth with divided steps could be especially pertinent. The excavated mansion in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, which may have belonged to a High Priest, also has a miqveh with divided steps. Grenfell and Hunt, who wrote before the aforementioned sites had been discovered and excavated, may be forgiven for thinking miqvaoth with divided steps are unattested in Judaism, but Bovon should know better. He says he is unable to find evidence of divided steps. He cites the *Epistle of Aristeas* 106<sup>24</sup> and *m. Sheq.* 8:2,<sup>25</sup> but is not satisfied, because divided steps are not explicitly mentioned. But the discovery of miqvaoth, with divided steps, in the vicinity of the Temple Mount itself, surely clarifies the meaning of these texts.<sup>26</sup> To claim, as Bovon does, that POxy 840's miqveh and divided steps relate in

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<sup>23</sup> For discussion and photographs, see W. S. LaSor, "Discovering What Jewish Miqva'ot Can Tell Us," *BARev* 13/1 (1987) 52-59; R. Reich, "The Great Mikveh Debate," *BARev* 19/2 (1993) 52-53; idem, *EDDS* 1.562. H. Eshel ("The Pools of Sepphoris: Ritual Baths or Bathtubs?" *BARev* 26/4 [2000] 44) remarks: "Another telltale sign of a mikveh often appears in excavations: a low partition that divides the stairs into two staircases, one for going into the bath, one for coming out."

<sup>24</sup> "For the ground ascends, since the city is built upon a mountain. There are steps too which lead up to the cross roads, and some people are always going up, and others down and they keep as far apart from each other as possible on the road because of those who are bound by the rules of purity, lest they should touch anything which is unlawful."

<sup>25</sup> "'All utensils found in Jerusalem, on the path down to an immersion pool, are assumed to be unclean. [If they are found] on the path up from the immersion pool, they are assumed to be clean, For the way down is different from the way up,' the words of R. Meir" (mid-second cent.).

<sup>26</sup> According to *m. Sheq.* 8:2 (cited in preceding note), unclean vessels are to descend on one side of the steps, while clean vessels are to ascend on the other; see R. Reich, "Mishnah, Sheqalim 8:2, and the Archaeological Evidence," in A. Oppenheimer, U. Rappaport, and M. Stern (eds.), *Jerusalem in the Second Temple* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Svi, 1980) 225-56 (Hebrew, with English summary on p. xiv). The recently excavated miqvaoth with divided steps strongly encourage seeing POxy 840 as describing authentic Jewish practice, whereby people also descended on one side and ascended on the other. Furthermore, *m. Tamid* 1:1 tells of the priests' use of the Chamber of Immersion and how the priests did not sleep in their priestly vestments, but slept in their own clothes, with the priestly garments beneath their heads. This is entirely consistent with POxy 840's portrait of a priest who bathes, descending on one side and ascending on the other, and then changes his clothes. One should also note *T. Levi* 9:11, where the patriarch Levi, father of the Israel's priestly tribe, enjoins his sons: "Before you enter the sanctuary, bathe; while you are sacrificing, wash; and again when the sacrifice is concluded, wash."

some way to Christian baptismal ceremonies seems farfetched and unnecessary.<sup>27</sup>

Fifthly, the rhetoric, “dogs and swine . . . harlots and flute-girls,” is metaphorical and hyperbolic,<sup>28</sup> not careless misunderstanding of the pragmata of the Temple Mount.<sup>29</sup> Jesus’ point is that all sorts of people have washed in the waters fed by the various channels of running water. They may technically meet the requirements for entry into the area where ritually pure Israelites may view the sacred vessels, but inwardly they are as corrupt as ever. Moreover, the idea that impurity flows upstream may be presupposed here.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, Jesus is suggesting that the water itself is contaminated and cannot convey purity, which is consistent with his teaching elsewhere (cf. Mark 7:14-23). Jesus’ criticism of the ruling priest, which almost has a Qumranian ring to it, may allude to 1 Kgs 22:38, where the dogs licked up the blood of Ahab and the harlots washed themselves in the bloodied water.<sup>31</sup>

There are therefore no grounds for saying that the author of this story does not understand either Judaism or the topography and custom of the Temple.<sup>32</sup> Without deciding the question of authenticity, I think it is fair to conclude that POxy 840 in fact does relate a story from a reasonably well informed Jewish perspective. If the conclusion that has been reached is justified, then POxy 840 offers important documentation of ongoing controversy between Jewish believers in Jesus and Jews who viewed with misgivings Jesus’

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<sup>27</sup> Bovon, “Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840,” 717, 719, 721. Bovon views the story recounted in POxy 840 as essentially an allegory.

<sup>28</sup> As seen in 2 Pet 2:22, where the “dog turns back to his own vomit [alluding to Prov 26:11], and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire”; Matt 7:6, where Jesus warns his followers: “Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine”; or Matt 23:25-28, where we read of polished cups “full of extortion and rapacity,” or white washed tombs “full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.” The hyperbolic nature of POxy 840 is rightly recognized by Bovon, “Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840,” 717.

<sup>29</sup> This point is missed by Grenfell and Hunt, “Fragment of an Uncanonical Gospel,” 3, who comment that Jesus’ language is “incredible,” indicating that the author of the fragment “was not really well acquainted with the Temple.”

<sup>30</sup> If so, this offers an important point of agreement with rabbinic halakah.

<sup>31</sup> First observed by M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924; corrected ed., 1953) 29.

<sup>32</sup> Admittedly, the “Pool of David” remains unattested, but other pools and miqvaoth in which ritual immersion took place in the vicinity of the Temple Mount have been uncovered. Excavation on the Temple Mount itself, which is not possible in today’s political climate, may someday uncover such a pool.

teaching concerning purity in general and perhaps ritual bathing in particular. In a Jewish context, this story would provide clarification and rationale for embracing a faith that no longer regarded the pragmata of the Temple cultus as sacred or normative (in sharp contrast with emerging rabbinic Judaism).<sup>33</sup>

## CONCLUSION

These newly discovered (or re-discovered) Jewish recensions of Matthew attest an active intramural struggle in the early centuries of the Jesus movement, as the Church began its bifurcation into a Gentile faith and a Jewish community of messianists struggling to maintain faith and identity, caught between Gentile Christianity, on the one hand, and emerging rabbinic Judaism and an increasingly hostile synagogue, on the other. Simply put, Gentile Christianity devalued Torah and Jewish traditions, while rabbinic Judaism devalued the life and death of Jesus Messiah. Jewish messianism struggled to maintain both.

We find several specific and distinctive features in the Jewish Gospels: (1) evidence of enrichment of the Gospel narrative with Jewish halakic traditions, traditions which may or may not be endorsed; (2) pruning Gospel narrative of elements that do not fit comfortably with Jewish beliefs and sensitivities (however, sometimes this pruning results not from general Jewish beliefs, but from narrower, sectarian beliefs, such as seen in the vegetarianism of *Ebionites*); (3) the addition of elements that reflect Jewish piety and customs; and (4) the appearance in places of ideas that reflect Jewish wisdom.

Our observations in general terms cohere with the tendencies observed in the fragmentary Gospel traditions preserved by the Church Fathers. What emerges is a colorful mosaic of Jewish messianic faith that resists modern scholarly attempts to synthesize, thus over-simplifying its characteristics, or to marginalize, as though Jewish messianism was never mainstream. These more or less new Gospel materials must be brought fully into the discussion, if we are to understand better the developments and nuances of Christianity

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<sup>33</sup> On aspects of this tension, see R. A. Pritz, "The Jewish Christian Sect of the Nazarenes and the Mishnah," in D. Assaf (ed.), *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*. Division A: *The Period of the Bible* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986) 125-30.

in all its dimensions.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See C. A. Evans, “The Jewish Gospel Tradition,” in R. Hvalvik and O. Skarsaune (eds.), *Jewish Believers in Jesus: A History from Antiquity to the Present*. Volume One: *Antiquity (ca. 30–500 C.E.)* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson) forthcoming.