

The Gospel according to the Hebrews

Walter F. Adeney, 1904

This mysterious work – the mere wreckage of which is all that has been washed up on the shores of our late times – hovers before the imagination of New Testament scholars like a phantom ship, intangible, indeterminate. Periodically the ghostly book reappears in criticism only to be discredited as again it glides away into obscurity. In the discussion of its merits the tables are turned – heresy believes and orthodoxy doubts. A skeptical orthodoxy brings a charge of unwarrantable licence in championing its claims on credulous heresy. At the dawn of the scientific method in criticism, its founder, Lessing, approaching the subject from the standpoint of general literature, propounded the idea that the Gospel according to the Hebrews was the primary source of our Synoptics (A.D. 1778). Stimulated by that great writer's exciting suggestion, Eichhorn, a specialist in the subject, early in the nineteenth century worked out in detail the conception that some Syro-Chaldaic work was the original composition at the root of our first three gospels, and then the discussion drifted into wider fields, and the identity of the hypothetical source with the traditional Gospel according to the Hebrews was variously regarded. Discussing the subject in the year 1866, Hilgenfeld declared triumphantly, "At length the Gospel according to the Hebrews offers those of us who are investigating the origin of the gospels the *punctum Archimedis* which so many learned men have vainly sought in the Gospel according to Mark. Pfleiderer is more cautious; but he finds one of the sources of Matthew in a strongly Jewish work of primitive Christianity, adding "that this source was the Gospel according to the Hebrews, which is also often cited elsewhere, is probable (*wahrscheinlich*), though nothing can be affirmed of it with certainty." More recently Harnack has assigned the origin of the Hebrew's gospel to the period 65 (70) to 100 A.D., holding that it probably belongs to the beginning of this period. Inasmuch as he gives 70 to 75 as the probable date of Matthew, and 78 to 93 as the probable date of Luke and Acts, evidently he is inclined to set the Hebrew's gospel earlier than both these Synoptics, and of course much earlier than John, while it may be no later than Mark, the first written canonical gospel, which he assigns to 65 to 70 A.D. And now we have the latest critical life of Christ, written by Oscar Holtzmann, an elaborate work of great learning, acuteness of observation, and freshness of thought, which challenges the attention of students as one of the important contributions to the subject, claiming that the Gospel according to the Hebrews as a primary authority – as far as its fragments go – parallel in historical worth to the Synoptics, and even in some respects to be preferred to them, while our Forth Gospel is almost wholly relegated to the realm of legend. Among English writers the tendency has been

to discredit the work as a late product, a secondary gospel, based on one or more of our New Testament gospels – Matthew in particular – the view, for example, maintained by Lightfoot, Westcott, and Salmon. But in the year 1879 Mr. Nicholson, Principle Librarian and Superintendent of the London Institution, published an exhaustive study on the subject, in which he endeavored to vindicate the antiquity and independence of the Gospel according to the Hebrews.

The high historical value recently set on this Gospel by scholars and critics brings it again into the light, and demands a searching examination of its claims. I do not profess to offer here any such complete treatment of the subject. But some of the most significant points may be indicated within reasonable limits of space.

First, let us summarize the principle known facts concerning the gospel. Our fullest information comes from Jerome. He writes of “the Gospel belonging to (*juxta*) the Hebrews which the Nazarenes use to this day; according to (*secundum*) the Apostles, or as most (*plerique* – perhaps meaning “many”) assert belonging to (*juxta*) Matthew. This gospel, then, was existing in the days of Jerome as a scriptural document, read in the churches of Jewish Christians known as Nazarenes. Jerome suggests that his own opinion was that it should be ascribed to the Apostles, though he admits as an alternative adopted by many, if not by the majority of his contemporaries, that it should be assigned to Matthew. Jerome has many references to this gospel, and seven times he tells us that it was largely attributed to Matthew, especially by Jewish Christians. In one very important passage he informs us that he had himself seen the book and copied it. His statement is as follows –

Matthew, who also is Levi, and who from a tax-gatherer came to be an Apostle, first of all the Evangelists composed a gospel of Christ in Judaea in the Hebrew language and characters, for the benefit of those of the circumcision who had believed: who translated it into Greek is not sufficiently ascertained. Furthermore, the Hebrew itself is preserved in the library at Caesarea which the martyr Pamphilus so diligently collected. I also was allowed by the Nazarenes who use this volume in the Syrian city of Beroea to copy it,” etc.

In another place Jerome writes of “the Gospel which is called according to the Hebrews (*secundum Hebreos*), and was lately translated by me into the Greek language and the Latin, which also Origin (*Adamantius*, the church name Origen often uses.”)

Again he says that it was written in the “Chaldee and Syriac (*i.e.* Aramaic) language but in Hebrew letters. Here, then, we have an exact, unmistakable description of the literary form of the work. It was in the Aramaic dialect, but written in Hebrew characters. In this form Jerome found it at Caesarea. And again at Beroea, when he was allowed to copy it. Subsequently he translated it into Greek and Latin. Much discussion has arisen on the sub-

ject of Jerome's translation. But two points seem to be clear, in spite of all the uncertainty that surrounds the whole question. First, this Aramaic work could not have been the original of our Greek Matthew, for in that case Jerome would not have had occasion to translate it, since our Matthew in Greek was familiar to him as part of his New Testament. Second, in spite of the fact that Jerome made his translation, it seems to be demonstrated by Harnack that the Gospel according to the Hebrews had been translated into Greek long before this – as early as the latter part of the second century A.D. The reference to it in Eusebius, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria prove this. The only explanation of Jerome's action is that he had not met with the translation which perhaps was chiefly used in Egypt, while his researches were carried out in Palestine and Syria, where the original Aramaic text was in use among the Jewish churches.

Tracing the references to the gospel further back we have an important witness in Eusebius, the most learned and fair-minded Christian scholar at the beginning of the fourth century. After giving his list of new Testament books, the Father of Church History adds, "Some moreover have also counted in this class (*i.e.* the class of universally acknowledged books) the Gospel according to the Hebrews, in which especially those Hebrews who have received the Christ rejoice. Now all these" (*i.e.* some books just mentioned and also our Gospel according to the Hebrews) "will belong to the disputed books." These are books in Eusebius' second list, accepted by some, rejected by others. Here he would place the Hebrew Gospel, but only after stating in his candid way that some would go further and reckon it to be of undisputed canonicity. A little later, referring to those Ebionites who did not reject the divinity of Christ, he says, "using that gospel alone which is called the Gospel according to the Hebrews, they took no small account of the rest." We have already seen how Jerome stated that Origen used the Gospel according to the Hebrews. One or two of his references to this work have been preserved. Thus before quoting the most difficult passage of the gospel that has come down to us – which we shall have to discuss a little later – he writes, "But if anyone admits the Gospel according to the Hebrews, where the Savior Himself says," etc. Here the use of the indicative *admits* shows that Origen knew of people who accepted this gospel as authoritative. In another place, where we only have the Latin version of Origen's work, we read, "It is written in a certain gospel which is called 'according to the Hebrews,' where the technical phrase it is written" points to a citation from recognized scripture. But Origen (in this Latin version) adds, "If, however, anyone is pleased to take that as now authoritative," etc., showing that there were doubts on the position to be assigned to the gospel. Going a step further back to Origen's predecessor, Clement of Alexandria, we come upon a quotation from this gospel in Greek, introduced by the technical formula for scripture: "Just as in the Gospel according to the Hebrews it is written," etc. This is the earliest

known citation from the Gospel according to the Hebrews by name. But we have several earlier references to the book, and one probable citation from it, though there the book is not mentioned. Irenaeus tells us in two places that the Ebionites only used the Gospel according to Matthew. It is generally assumed that Irenaeus here means our Matthew, and indeed, since we know he used that book and attached a unique value to the four gospels of which it is the first, it is difficult to come to any other conclusion on the subject. Nevertheless we have seen from what Jerome, our chief authority, said, that the book used by the Jewish Christians of his day was not our Matthew, but the Gospel according to the Hebrews in Aramaic, which they, in common with many others, ascribed to Matthew. Now the Ebionites of whom Irenaeus wrote were the Jewish Christians of his day. It is not to be supposed that after using the Greek canonical Matthew in the second century these people had discarded it in favor of an Aramaic book by the end of the third century. The tendency would rather be the other way. Nor can we get any assistance from the fact that, while Irenaeus called the Jewish Christian Ebionites, Jerome called them Nazarenes, for if these are not two names for the same people, the Ebionites must be regarded as the more heretical, rejecting fundamental doctrine of orthodoxy, were nearer to the Catholic Church. It cannot be supposed that the heretical Ebionites accepted our Matthew in Greek, but the more orthodox Nazarenes used a different and more Jewish gospel. Accordingly, Mr Nicholson concludes that Irenaeus was referring to the Gospel according to the Hebrews when he wrote of the gospel used by the Ebionites, and consequently held this to be Matthew's work. But since he accepted our Matthew as the genuinely apostolic gospel, that would only be possible on condition that he held the Gospel according to the Hebrews to have been the Hebrew or Aramaic original of our Matthew. This, we see, even Jerome seemed to allow. The simpler explanation of the case is that Irenaeus had never seen the Gospel according to the Hebrews. There is no evidence that it had reached Western Europe when Irenaeus lived. All our references to it are found in the East—Palestine, Syria, Egypt. Hearing that the Ebionites used a gospel, Irenaeus would naturally conclude that this was the Matthew gospel which he knew, while in point of fact it was another gospel which the Jewish Christians ascribed to the publican Apostle. A comparison with Hippolytus shows us that Irenaeus is capable of much greater errors than this in his often hearsay descriptions of heretics. The conclusion we come to therefore is, that Irenaeus is no authority for ascribing the Gospel according to the Hebrews to Matthew, but that he does give us evidence for believing that in his day Jewish Christians used a gospel which they ascribed to Matthew; and then, combining this information with that afforded two centuries later by Jerome, for concluding that gospel to have been no other than the Gospel according to the Hebrews.

Eusebius gives us two earlier references to this Gospel of an indirect character, but still

unmistakable. The first is in Hegesippus, a Jewish Christian writer, but of the Catholic Church, not an Ebionite, whom Harnack dates to 150 A.D. "He also," says Eusebius, "adduces something out of the Gospel according to the Hebrews and the Syriac, and particularly out of the Hebrew language." The passage is confused; probably the text is corrupt. But whatever may have been its original phrasing, plainly it asserts that Hegesippus quoted this gospel in a Syriac or Hebrew form – possibly meaning, what Jerome told us, that it was in the Syriac language, but in Hebrew letters. Now I am induced to think that the author of *Supernatural Religion* is correct when he argues that we have no evidence showing that Hegesippus used any other gospel. Nevertheless, seeing that we have but a very few fragments of Hegesippus, Dr Lightfoot was also plainly right in his triumphant refutation of the two assumptions, built on this fact by the author of *Supernatural Religion*, first that Hegesippus never quoted any of our gospels, and second, that he did not even know of their existence. For our present purpose, however, that controversy is beside the mark. What we have to take note of here is, that so early a writer as Hegesippus made use of the Gospel according to the Hebrews as an authoritative document.

The other indirect early reference to this gospel preserved by Eusebius is a statement concerning Papias, who cannot be dated later than A.D. 160, and perhaps wrote much earlier. The Church historian, after mentioning various things recorded by Papias, adds, "and he has published also another relation of a woman accused of many sins before the Lord, which the Gospel according to the Hebrews contains. We cannot be certain, on the grounds of this remark, that Papias used the Hebrew gospel. All that Eusebius tells us is, that he gives a story that is contained in it. He may have obtained this story by tradition from the elders, whose information he elsewhere informs us he valued very highly. Still there is some degree of probability that he used the book and there we must be content to let the matter rest.

There is yet one earlier indication of the use of the Gospel according to the Hebrews in the church of the second century. In the Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans we read, "For I know and believe that He was in the flesh even after the resurrection; and when He came to Peter and his company, He said to them, *Lay hold and handle me, and see that I am not an incorporeal daemon.*"

Now Jerome quotes the expression *incorporeal daemon*, and ascribes it to the gospel used by the Nazarenres, saying, "For when the Apostles thought Him a spirit, or, according to the gospel the Nazarenes of the Hebrews use, a *daemon* without a body," etc.

Then we have the fuller expression in Origen, who, while discussing the term 'incorporeal,' writes, "And if anyone should quote it to us out of the little treatise entitled The Teach-

ing of Peter, in which the Savior seems to say to His disciples 'I am not an incorporeal *daemon*' I have to reply, in the first place, that that work is not included in the Ecclesiastical Books." These references leave with us the suggestion that the curious expression was to be found in "The Teaching of Peter" as well as in the Gospel according to the Hebrews, possibly taken by the one work from the other. There must be some doubt, therefore, as to the question in which book Ignatius found the saying, if indeed, he derived it from either of them. Farther back than this we cannot find any traces of the gospel. But neither do the early patristic writings contain certain references to any of the canonical gospels before the time of Ignatius; the possible allusions to one or more of them in the apostolic fathers are too indefinite to be cited as evidence. Accordingly, it may be admitted that the external evidence for the Gospel according to the Hebrews is nearly if not quite as ancient as that for the New Testament Synoptics, though very much less abundant.

But our assurance concerning the genuineness and reliability of the Synoptic gospels is by no means confined to the results of patristic inquiries. It rests much more on the self-evidencing character of the books themselves. If, therefore, the Gospel according to the Hebrews is to be brought into line with those gospels, as some contend – not to speak of the idea of giving it priority of authority – it must stand this test. Here we have to discriminate between two questions that are not at all conterminous – the question of antiquity and the question of authority. It would be quite possible to allow greater antiquity for the gospel according to the Hebrews, and yet to judge it less reliable than the gospels, which, on this hypothesis, came later. St Luke, in his preface, treats his predecessors with scant courtesy. Suppose we grant the first contention of its champions, that the Gospel according to the Hebrews was among those predecessors, we may still be justified in giving it an inferior historical value if it affords evidence of being based on uncertain information, inaccurately reported, received with indiscriminating credulity, or warped by prejudice. How do the fragments that we possess help us in settling this point? Let us examine the more suggestive of them in order to see whether they furnish materials for an answer to the question.

Taking these fragments in the order of the gospel history, and passing over two which are almost identical with our Matthew, we come upon this remarkable extract preserved by Jerome: –

Behold the mother of the Lord and his brothers said to Him, John the Baptist is baptizing for the remission of sins: let us go and be baptized by him. But He said to them: What have I sinned that I should go and be baptized by him? unless perhaps just this that I said is ignorance.

Now Oscar Holtzmann maintains that such a saying would never have been admitted into a gospel if it had not proceeded from the lips of Jesus Himself, since in all subsequent

times it was reckoned a sin to doubt the sinlessness of Jesus. He attributes the idea of the sinlessness of Christ to the Apostle Paul, and he thinks he finds a different opinion expressed by our Lord Himself in two passages (Mark x. 18 and xiv. 36). This is not the place to discuss the great subject of the sinlessness of Jesus. Still it may be remarked that to base a theory on questionable inferences derived from the two passages given, to the neglect of all the gospel testimony to the contrary, is not scientific, especially since an examination of those passages shows that the interpretation of them assumed by Hotzmann is far from being warranted. The first admits of various interpretations; the second is not usually regarded as indicative of more than the limitation and weakness natural to human life. To take our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane as a sign that He confessed Himself to be not sinless is to read a strange meaning into it. This passage from the Gospel according to the Hebrews stands absolutely alone in containing a definite confession of conceivable faultiness assigned to Jesus Christ. It is possible to accept it as historical without contradicting the idea of the perfect sinlessness of Jesus which runs through the whole New Testament, if we suppose the word 'sin' to be used here for a technical breach of the letter of the law, apart from moral evil, as it might well be understood in a strict Jewish household. Indeed, it would seem to be this that was intended by the word 'ignorance.' We can hardly imagine how even an absolutely innocent child could have been brought up without ever transgressing unknown rules. This impossibility was recognized by the rabbis when they fixed the age of thirteen as the period of life at which a boy was to be required to keep the Torah. It may be allowed that, spoken in this sense, the saying might have fallen from the lips of Jesus. It is not safe to say that is certainly not genuine. All the same, the whole conversation has the legendary air of the apocryphal gospels, with their love of personal detail. Though of most doubtful origin, it is probably very ancient; we cannot well imagine such a tradition creeping into a gospel in the later period, when anything even apparently derogatory to our Lord would have been resented as much as by the Jewish Christian as by the Catholic Church.

The next fragment refers to occurrences at our Lord's baptism. For this, too, we are indebted to Jerome. It is as follows: –

It came to pass that when the Lord had come up from the water, the whole fountain of the Holy Spirit descended and rested on Him, and said to Him: My son in all the prophets I waited for Thee, that I might come and rest on Thee; for Thou art my rest, Thou art my firstborn Son who reignest for ever.

This passage contains several peculiarities: (1) Jesus is called "the Lord" (*dominus*), a characteristic of later usage. (2) The simpler conception of the Holy Spirit which we meet with in the canonical gospels is enlarged to "the whole fountain of the Holy Spirit." (3) Jesus is addressed by the Holy Spirit as "Son." (4) The reference to the prophets suggests the age

of reflection, when prophecy was recognized as fulfilled in Christ. (5) The description of Jesus as God's 'firstborn Son' is not met with in any of the four gospels; in the New Testament it does not appear till late in the development of apostolic teaching. All these five points indicate a later age than the Synoptics.

But the most remarkable quotation from the Gospel according to the Hebrews which we possess is that which refers to the temptation. It is found twice in Origen, in the first place directly ascribed to this gospel, and the first part of it three times in Jerome. In this passage Jesus is represented as saying, "My mother the Holy Ghost lately took me by one of my hairs and carried me to the great mountain Tabor." Oscar Holtzmann thinks that this remarkable saying is probably genuine, and represents an older account of the temptation than anything we have on the subject in the gospels. His reason for coming to this extraordinary conclusion are, that here the incident is given in words ascribed to Jesus Himself, and since it must have first been narrated by Him, this fact points to priority; and further that Mount Tabor, being visible from Nazareth or its vicinity, the idea of the temptation being connected to that place points to our Lord's residence at Nazareth. The temptation is approached from Nazareth. Even the strange reference to the mode of carrying, he points out, might be suggested by Old Testament precedents. But surely the whole passage is obviously apocryphal. There is nothing at all approaching it in any other of our Lord's recorded sayings. It would be difficult to compress more improbabilities into a single sentence. (1) Jesus nowhere else speaks of the Holy Spirit as his mother. In the light of this passage we must understand the passage just previously discussed concerning the baptism to mean that there also the Holy Spirit as Christ's mother addressed Him as her firstborn son! The idea is accounted for by the fact that the Aramaic word for spirit is feminine, but such a grammatical inference is more in the style of the later times when gnostic fancies were afloat, than the simple matter-of-fact manner of the primitive gospels, or our Lord's way of speaking about Himself. (2) The fantastic description of the manner in which Jesus is here supposed to speak of the Holy Spirit conveying Him to the scene of the temptation is scarcely less incongruous. It is not to be denied that Jesus commonly talked in figurative language, spoke of a fig-tree, or the Mount of Olives, or Mount Hermon, being transported by the sea of faith, promised His disciples immunity if they trod on snakes and scorpions, declared that they should forthwith see angels ascending and descending on Him. But in all such cases the metaphorical character of his utterances is apparent. Here however the way in which Mount Tabor is introduced excludes the idea of anything but a physical transportation through the air. It may be urged that in the second temptation a very similar situation is created when we are told that the devil set Him on a pinnacle of the temple, as well as on a high mountain. But these things are stated in the course of the temptation., and they have not the most peculiar features of the narrative in the

Gospel according to the Hebrews. Oscar Holtzman thinks that Jesus may be using figurative language, based on Apocryphal and Old Testament analogies. It is much more likely that those analogies gave rise to the myth in Jewish Christian circles. Ezekiel says that the hand of the Lord God fell upon him, and adds, "he put forth the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem," etc. Here not only is the same curious mode of carrying described but it is also ascribed to "the spirit." In *Bel and the Dragon* we read concerning Habbakuk. "Then the angel of the Lord took him by the crown, and lifted him up by the hair of his head, and with the blast of his breath set him in Babylon over the den." It seems plain that our gospel fragment must have been inspired by one or the other, or perhaps both, of these earlier passages. The prophet, it should be observed, unlike the Hebrew evangelist, is careful to indicate the fact that he is writing figuratively by inserting the saving clause "in the visions of God," before mentioning so realistic a destination of his aerial voyage as the city of Jerusalem. (3) Mount Tabor would have been an absolutely site for the scene of the temptation, because there was a Roman fortress with a garrison of soldiers there in the time of Christ. For the same reason, as well as on other grounds, the tradition that fixed on this conspicuous round hill in the plain of Jezreel as the Mount of Transfiguration is equally erroneous. But the twofold selection of the same hill is not without significance, for it shows that the fancy of early Christian times was readily attracted to it, perhaps simply because of its peculiar situation. For this reason it was singled out in the Old Testament for special notice, as by the Psalmist who wrote,

The north and the south, thou hast created them:
Tabor and Hermon rejoice in thy name.

And again by Jeremiah, where he writes, "As I live saith the King, whose name is the Lord of Hosts, surely like Tabor among the mountains, and like Carmel by the sea, so shall he come." In other words, the appearance of Tabor in the Gospel according to the Hebrews is literary, not historical; it is due to reminiscences of Scripture, not to observation of contemporary conditions; therefore it is just not such a reference to the mountain as would be made by a resident at Nazareth in sight of the fortress – as Oscar Holtzmann supposes – but, on the contrary, the kind of reference that would come to a writer at a distance, to whom Tabor was merely a Bible mountain, known to him by the Scripture passages concerning it.

When we put all these considerations together, can we suppose that this grotesque statement in the Gospel according to the Hebrews is to be accepted as of even higher historical value than the account of the temptation in the Synoptic gospels? Surely the more we look into it, the more shall we find the obvious impression of its legendary character confirmed.

Proceeding further, we have Jerome pointing out that in its version of the Lord's prayer this gospel has the Hebrew word *Machar*, meaning "of the morrow," where we read "daily" in the phrase "our daily bread," a rendering now widely accepted as a translation of the Greek of our gospels, so that in concurrence of the Hebrew gospel here is of peculiar interest. Whatever may be its historical value, at all events it affords a most ancient comment on a difficult passage, and very likely it gives us the very word used by our Lord.

This gospel also adds an interesting bit of information about the man with the withered hand, stating that he said, "I am a mason, seeking my living by my hands; I pray thee Jesus, to restore my health, lest I shamefully beg my food." The passage has been described as obviously a late gloss. Can we be sure of this? There is nothing inherently improbable in it, and the simplest appellation "Jesus" speaks for its antiquity and genuineness. A late writer, not adhering to a true tradition, would certainly have written "Lord" or "Teacher," in the usual style of the gospels.

Here is an interesting version of our Lord's teaching about forgiveness, taken from the Gospel according to the Hebrews: "If thy brother sin in word and make satisfaction to you seven times a day accept him. Simon, his disciple, said to him, 'Seven times a day!' The Lord answered and said to him, 'Yea, I tell thee, up to seven times seven; for in the prophets also, after they have been anointed by the Holy Spirit, the word of sin is found.'"

This has affinities with both Matthew and with Luke. It is Matthew only who gives us the "seventy times seven," but Luke only mentions "the day." The final clause about the prophets is not in either of those gospels, but there is not anything extravagant or unlikely in it. It may be the comment of some later teacher, or the writer of the gospel. But there is nothing to forbid us to accept it as a genuine saying of our Lord.

Origen has preserved a longer extract from the Gospel according to the Hebrews, containing an incident of the rich young ruler, which varies considerably from all the Synoptic accounts. We have this in the Old Latin version only. It is as follows: –

Another of the rich men said to Him, Master, what good thing shall I do that I may live? He said to him, Man, do the law and the prophets. He answered Him, I have done it. He said to him, Go sell all thou possessest and divide it among the poor, and come follow me. But the rich man began to scratch his head, and it did not please him. And the Master said to him: How do you say, I have done the law and the prophets? since it is written in the law, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself and behold many of thy brothers, sons of Abraham, are covered with filth, dying of hunger, and your house is full of many good things, and nothing at all goes out of it to them. And turning to Simon, he said, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go into the kingdom of heaven.

The crudity of this passage has often been pointed to as a sign of its late and untrustworthy character. But is this just? Does it not rather suggest the primitive nature of the narrative? If the Gospel according to the Hebrews contained much writing of this sort we can understand how the main body of the Church refused to use the book even if it were as old as the Synoptics, since the latter works are better in tone and style. Still there are features of the paragraph that point to a possible derivation in part from our gospels, rather than priority to them and absolute independence. The description of the poor and the rich man's neglect of them reads like an echo of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke; but the question, "What good thing shall I do?" and the expression, "the kingdom of heaven" with which the extract closes points to Matthew, the only New Testament book in which either occurs. It might appear, therefore, that we have here a conflation of Matthew's account of the young man who came to Christ with the parable in Luke. But even if that be allowed, we have also a good deal that is found in none of the gospels. This may be set down to later imagination working over the story. But there is nothing to prevent us from attributing it to a genuine tradition.

Jerome has an extract from the Gospel according to the Hebrews, describing what happened at the temple when Jesus died, where we read that "the lintel of the temple, of infinite size, was broken and divided"; and again, Jerome says that we read in this gospel, not that "the veil of the temple was torn," but that "the lintel of the temple, of wonderful size, fell down." This variation cannot be traced to anything in the gospels, unless it might be regarded as a legendary modification of the Synoptic narrative based on Mark xiii. 2. It may be thought that the typical significance of the rendering of the veil of the temple, opening up the secluded inner sanctuary to public view, would lead to the tradition in our Synoptics being made more welcome in Gentile churches, while the alternative tradition in the Gospel according to the Hebrews, not containing the significant suggestion, would be more acceptable to Jewish Christians.

Jerome has preserved a remarkable extract from this gospel about an appearance of the risen Christ to James the brother of the Lord, which has become well known to all students of early Christian times, It is as follows: –

But when the Lord had given his shroud to the priest's servant, he went to James and appeared to him; for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour when he had drunk the Lord's cup until he should see him risen from the sleeping ones.

This passage cannot be traced to anything in the Synoptics, although perhaps the latter part of it might be regarded as founded on Luke xxiv. 41-48. But the resemblance is very slight. In our third gospel, it is broiled fish that is brought. Jesus eats it Himself and His

reason for doing so is to demonstrate that He is not merely a spirit. In the Hebrew gospel the case is entirely different. Bread is brought; James, not Jesus, is to eat; and the reason for doing so is his release from his oath. The story, since it concerns James, may be said to be a legendary gloss on St Paul's bare, brief assertion, "Then he appeared to James." [Cor. xv. 7.] Still, as the story stands, it must be understood to be independent of the New Testament. Can we regard it as an ancient and reliable tradition? In attempting to answer this question the following points should be noted: –

1. The prominence given to James, the head of the Jewish Church, is a gospel written for Hebrew Christians, may be regarded as a set-off against the prominence of Peter in the other gospels. They contain the Petrine tradition (Mark being the interpreter of Peter). The Gospel according to the Hebrews may contain the Jacobean tradition, and each perhaps may be historically valid. Still we cannot but suspect a 'tendency,' a certain bias, in this prominence of James.

2. It would seem from this extract that Jesus made His first appearance to James. But our earliest and best authenticated account of the appearances of the risen Christ, given by St Paul, puts the appearance to Cephas first, and that to James in fourth place.

3. The reference to the shroud looks apocryphal.

4. So does the reference to the priest's servant. Is this suggest by Mark xiv. 47? Or may we suppose that the incident in the garden actually led to the high priest's servant to become a follower of Jesus Christ? It is significant that in John (xviii. 10.) The man's name is given. Why is this, except that he was of some interest to the church in later times?

5. James' presence at the Lord's Supper does not agree with any of our four gospel accounts. It implies that he was a close follower of Jesus, if not an apostle. This is rather like a reflection from his later importance to the church. But there is some question as to what drinking the cup of the Lord may mean here. May it be an allusion to that cup of which Jesus spoke to James and his brother John on an earlier occasion, the cup of Christ's sufferings? If so, in the passage before us the idea must be that the agony of James suffered when Jesus was crucified was his drinking of the Lord's bitter cup.

6. For the same reason his oath, which represents his having more faith in the resurrection and more self-abandoning devotion to Christ than any of the Twelve, strikes us as apocryphal.

7. The description of Jesus as the Lord indicates here, as elsewhere in this gospel, a later time than Mark; on the other hand, the expression "the Son of Man," occurring at the end of the same passage, is quite in the primitive gospel style.

Origen supports Jerome in another extract, where Jesus after his resurrection appears, saying, "I am not an incorporeal spirit." The extract in Jerome is larger, running as follows: 'Behold, touch me and see, for I am not an incorporeal spirit. And immediately they touched him and believed.' This reads very much like an echo of Luke xxiv. 36-43, where, however, there is no reference to touching; the latter idea suggest incidents of the Magdalen and Thomas in John (xx. 17, 25, 27).

There is a fine statement of the Gospel according to the Hebrews preserved by Jerome according to which this gospel put among the greatest offenders the man who "saddened his brother's spirit." Similar is another saying from the same gospel, ascribed to the Lord, "Never be glad except when you look upon your brother with charity.:" This beautiful utterance almost guarantees its accuracy; it is so completely characteristic of the Lord, and so foreign to the temper of the Church in later times.

And now what conclusion are we to draw from the data as to the independence and authoritativeness of the gospel?

Surely at least a measure of independence must be conceded. Several of the fragments we have examined are not capable of being traced back to any of the canonical gospels. Some of these fragments bear on the face of them an inherent probability, while others are manifestly apocryphal. Taking them as a whole, we must confess that they contain a disproportionate amount of difficult statements when compared with our more sober canonical gospels. Therefore, even if we granted complete independence to this mysterious work, we should be compelled to relegating it to the secondary position those various attempts at writing a life of Christ, of which St Luke refers somewhat disparagingly in the preface of his gospel. Not only is it not always written in the best taste, but it displays dangerous credulity in accepting improbable legends. Then some of the less reliable fragments, as we have seen, appear to point to a date later than our Synoptics – Matthew and Luke in particular – finds its solution most easily in the conclusion that those works were known to its author. It would seem then, as a result of analysis, that the source of the work are of three kinds: (1) genuine traditions, not preserved in any of the canonical gospels; (2) unreliable legends, also not found in those gospels; (3) passages from two or more of those gospels which have been worked over by the author of the Gospel according to the Hebrews, in the light of his own independent materials. If these are just conclusions, we cannot allow the gospel the position of authority by the side of the Synoptics, sometimes in preference to them, and always in preference to the fourth gospel, claimed for it by Oscar Holtzmann. On the other hand, we must conclude the almost scornful treatment of it by Dr Salmon and other conservative scholars is not just. The book must be very ancient, almost contemporary with the Synoptics, and

it contains some fragments of historical tradition and teachings of Jesus, the neglect of which is unwarrantable. Still more unjust is it to treat this gospel as a heretical work, wilfully perverting the true Christian tradition of Christian origins. Assuredly it is honestly written; and there is no reason to doubt the good faith of its author.