

## *The Original Matthew*

---

The Ebionites were a Christian sect that claimed to preserve the original autograph of apostle Matthew in Hebrew. It is quoted often by Epiphanius in the 300s. He said its official title was “The Gospel according to Matthew.” (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30, 13, 2-3.)

Apostle John told Papias around 90 A.D. about this book of Matthew: “Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could.” (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* iii. 39, quoting *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, which in turn quotes Papias.) Irenaeus likewise says: “Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect.” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book III, Chapter I, quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, Chapter VIII.)

Jerome around 404 A.D. wrote of this too: “The Hebrew [Matthew] itself has been preserved until the present day in the library at Caesarea which Pamphilus so diligently gathered.” (Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, Chapter III.)

Is there any reason to believe this is significantly unlike our current Greek Matthew? Between Jerome and Epiphanius, we have twenty-

eight quotes. Jerome is always intrigued by the differences and has no charge of unorthodoxy. You can find Jerome's full quotes in footnotes to Matthew in the *Gospel Parallels* edited by Throckmorton. (This editor identifies the source as *Gospel of the Ebionites* but Jerome referred to it as the Hebrew Matthew from the Ebionites-Nazarenes.)

Epiphanius, however, screamed bloody murder that the genealogy in the Greek Matthew was absent in the Hebrew version of Matthew. For him this made it "incomplete, corrupt, [and] mutilated."<sup>1</sup> However, scholars now realize the absence of this genealogy enhances the validity of the Hebrew Matthew just as its presence weakens the validity of the Greek Matthew.<sup>2</sup>

Putting aside this one difference, all the other differences raised by Epiphanius are slight. In fact, what is often overlooked is that Epiphanius was nit-picking at just a few slight differences. Otherwise, the verses he quotes from the Ebionite *Matthew* in Hebrew read identical to our Greek *Matthew*. This demonstrates the balance of the Ebionites' *Gospel according to Matthew* must have been virtually *identical*

- 
1. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.13.1-30.22.4. See also, "The Gospel of the Ebionites [i.e., the Book of Matthew in Hebrew]," *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into the New Testament* (ed. Bart Ehrman) (Oxford University Press: 2003) at 13-14. Of the eight quotes listed in this compilation of this Hebrew version, there are only two variances from our Greek version. The first variance omits the genealogy that begins Matthew. *Id.*, at 13, # 2. The second has Jesus saying "I have no desire to eat the meat of the Passover lamb with you." *Id.*, # 8.
  2. Christian historian Ben Witherington III, in *New Testament History: A Narrative Account* (Baker: 2001) at 70 admits this genealogy in the Greek version of Matthew is problematical. Not only are there incongruities between Matthew's and Luke's genealogy, but the Greek *Matthew* is missing names that belong in the list which are mentioned in Hebrew Scripture. Yet, the Greek *Matthew's* list is portrayed as a complete list, as it *numbers the generations*. This list is plainly *inaccurate*. Since New Testament Scripture to be valid must be consistent with the Hebrew Scriptures, the genealogy in the Greek version of Matthew can not be valid scripture. It follows that a truer version of Matthew was apparently the one kept by the Ebionites and deposited at Caesarea.

---

*to the Greek version we all have now. Otherwise Epiphanius would have skewered them on those variances as well. Epiphanius' failure to do so allows an inference the Hebrew Matthew of the Ebionites otherwise matches our current Greek version.*

Jerome appears convinced the Hebrew Matthew to which the Nazarenes gave him access was the true autograph of Matthew. Jerome notes how it was protected in a private library at Caesarea. He writes in *On Illustrious Men* ch. III (404 A.D.):

Matthew, also called Levi, apostle and aforesaid publican, composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Judea in Hebrew for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek though by what author is uncertain. **The Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library at Caesarea which Pamphilus so diligently gathered.** I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Beroea, a city of Syria, who use it.<sup>1</sup>

The Hebrew version of Matthew which Jerome had access to from the Nazarenes of Beroea is most likely identical to the version from the Ebionites. Jerome thought they were identical. In Jerome's *Commentary on Matthew* (Matt. 12:13), he begins a remark, stating: "In the Gospel which the *Nazarenes and Ebionites use which I have lately translated into Greek from the Hebrew* and which is called by *many people the original of Matthew....*"

In this quote, we can see Jerome even included mention that some believe this version is the more authentic *original* version. Jerome appeared to regard it this way. He did not excoriate the Ebionites or Nazarenes for heresy based on the variances between the Greek and Hebrew Matthews, as Epiphanius had done. Instead, Jerome treated

---

1. This is available many places on the Internet, e.g., <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~vandersp/Courses/texts/jerviris.html>

this Hebrew Gospel of Matthew seriously and respectfully. Jerome's *Commentary on Matthew* demonstrates twenty variances with the Hebrew version of Matthew. Yet, not once does he suggest there is something wrong in the outlook of the Hebrew Matthew.<sup>1</sup>

What proves Jerome's high regard for this Hebrew Matthew is Jerome translated the entire Hebrew version. "I have lately translated into Greek from the Hebrew...." (Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* (Matt. 12:13).)

Yet, mysteriously, this translation of the Hebrew Matthew among all of Jerome's works has alone failed to survive. Likewise, nowhere in Western Christendom did this Hebrew version of Matthew survive. (It did apparently survive among Jews who were critical of it, and that is how it has been preserved. More on the Shem Tob version later.)

---

### *More Proofs that The Hebrew Matthew Is More Valid than the Greek*

There are more reasons to believe this Hebrew Matthew of the Ebionites and Nazarenes is a true autograph of the apostle Matthew. In Matthew 23:35, in our Greek version, Jesus utters an incorrect statement. Jesus is attributed to having said "upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of *Zacharias son of Barachias*, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." However, this is wrong. Jehoiada was the father of Zechariah the prophet, a high priest. It was not *Barachias*. (2 Chronicles 24:20.)

---

1. The variances Jerome found are footnoted in *Gospel Parallels* (Ed. Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr.) (5th Ed.(Nelson: 1992). A list of these variances is available via the internet. <http://www.angelfire.com/al2/truthchapel/naz>.

By contrast, let's see whether the Hebrew Matthew is correct. Jerome in his *Commentary on Matthew 23:35* says: "In the [Hebrew] gospel [of Matthew] which the Nazarenes use, for 'son of Barachiah' we find written, 'son of Jehoiada.'" The Nazarene-Ebionite version of Matthew is the correct account. Zechariah was not the son of Barachiah. The Greek version of Jerome's day and our own is incorrect.

Thus, this demonstrates the Ebionites-Nazarenes must have been preserving the original autograph of the apostle Matthew himself.

---

*Another Proof from the Competing Remnant of the Hebrew Matthew*

There are two competing texts today that legitimate scholars put forth as the original Matthew in Hebrew. Jerome's translation has been lost, so the best test is unfortunately unavailable.

Nevertheless, there does appear to be a clear winner between the two texts. There is another clear error in our Greek Matthew which one of these two texts does not perpetuate. However, one of the two persists in the same error as in the Greek Matthew.

Let's explore the background of these two versions of the Hebrew Matthew.

In 1385, a Hebrew Matthew was preserved by a Jew named Shem Tob ben Shaprut of Tudela in Castile, Spain. He wrote a polemical work against Christianity entitled *Eben Bohan*. In one chapter, he incorporates Matthew in Hebrew. This 1385 text was recovered by a responsible Bible scholar, George Howard. He published it as *The Gospel of Matthew according to a Primitive Hebrew Text* (Macon: Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987). The 1995 reprint fixes various errors and is the preferred text.

After Shem Tob's work in 1385, the Catholic church could not stand quiet forever. In 1555, one of its bishops sought to displace this Shem

Tob's version. Jean du Tillet, Bishop of Brioux, France, published in 1555 what he called an ancient manuscript found at Rome of Matthew's Gospel in Hebrew. This was reprinted in 1927 in a book entitled *An Old Hebrew Text of St. Matthew's Gospel* by Hugh J. Schonfield (Edinburgh: 1927).

How do we know which is more authentic? The Shem Tob version has Matthew 27:9 attributing the prophecy about the 30 pieces of silver to **Zechariah**. In fact this is true. (Zechariah 11:10-13.)<sup>1</sup> However, all the Greek and other manuscripts of Matthew 27:9 have Jesus incorrectly claim Jeremiah made this prophecy. Adam Clarke laments that there is not the slightest variant to rescue Jesus from this error in the *Greek manuscript tradition*.<sup>2</sup> This error persists in the du Tillet version; it ascribes this prophecy to *Jeremiah* in its version of Matthew 27:9.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, even though Shem Tob intended his book to find faults with Christianity, he unintentionally preserved the more authentic reading of Matthew 27:9. It correctly ascribes the 30-pieces-of-silver prophecy to Zechariah. Shem Tob had no motivation to change this to help

---

1. Zechariah 11:12-13 (KJV) reads: "(12) And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. (13) And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD."

2. Matt 27:3-9(KJV) reads in pertinent part:

(3) Then Judas...brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,...(5) And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. (6) And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said,...(7) And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in....(9) Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by **Jeremy** the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value.

Adam Clarke laments this error: "but it must be owned, that *Jeremy* is in all the Greek copies, in the Vulgate Latin, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions...."

3. This is noted in [http://www.paleotimes.org/whatsNew/2003/july\\_29\\_2003.htm](http://www.paleotimes.org/whatsNew/2003/july_29_2003.htm).

Christianity. If the Hebrew Matthew really said *Jeremiah*, Shem Tob would have pounced on that flaw to prove the lack of inspiration. The fact he did not thus gives his version credibility over Bishop du Tillet's version.

---

*Shem Tob Differences from Original Hebrew Matthew*

Shem Tob's version does not appear to be 100% identical to the original Hebrew Matthew. The genealogy of chapter one is missing in the Hebrew Matthew which Epiphanius mentions in the 300s. Yet Shem Tob's has it. Also, Shem Tob's version does not contain the correct description of Zechariah's father in Matthew 23:35. Shem Tob's follows the Greek text's error in that regard. Yet, we know from Jerome that the true Hebrew Matthew had Zechariah's father correct in Matthew 23:35. Thus, someone tampered with the Hebrew Matthew that Shem Tob used. They changed it to fit the Greek, even though the Greek text was wrong. This was not Shem Tob's alteration. Shem Tob has Matt. 27:9 correctly cite Zechariah as the source of the 30 pieces of silver prophecy. If Shem Tob were altering the text to fit errors in our Greek text, he could have changed Matt. 27:9 to match our Greek texts that all incorrectly say Jeremiah is the source of the prophecy. Thus, the error in Matt. 23:35 most likely was because someone altered the Hebrew Matthew upon which Shem Tob relied to fit the canonical Greek Matthew.

Despite there being some reversion to the errors in the Greek text, the Shem Tob *Gospel of Matthew* in Hebrew once more proves the Greek Matthew is flawed and not fully inspired. This also highlights that the original Hebrew version was *inspired* and 100% accurate.

---

*Shem Tob is the Closest to the Original*

What the Shem Tob *Gospel of Matthew* represents is the closest to the original Matthew that we will find. It reads almost identical to our Matthew, but with minor and subtle differences. There is nothing heretical.

**Howard's Claim of Significant Issues on Claim of Messiah**

George Howard tries to find significant differences in Shem Tob's Hebrew Matthew and our Greek Matthew. However, he largely takes them out-of-context and then exaggerates its meaning. He tries to claim, for example, that the Hebrew Matthew never claims Jesus is Messiah ("never equated with Jesus.") (*Id.* at 212.) Yet, this is completely false. To do this, he makes much of the fact the Greek Matthew has five times the word *Christ* used with Jesus' name, but it is missing in the Hebrew. (Matt. 1:1, 1:17, 1:18, 11:2 and 16:21). Yet, this is just as likely an addition by the Greek translator.

Moreover, the assertion that Jesus is Messiah is blatant in the Hebrew Matthew. For it clearly says Jesus is Messiah expressly in Matthew 16:16. This is Peter's declaration that Jesus is Messiah. Howard acknowledges this, but then claims it was "clearly" an addition. (*Id.* at 218.) However, he cites as proof his own argument at page 183. When you go there, you find sheer speculation of how Shem Tob's comments should be interpreted to imply an original text missing this claim. Why would Shem Tob add it? He was trying to find fault with Matthew. He would not add such a passage. This is nonsensical.

Furthermore, even if the Messianic assertion were not in the Hebrew version of Matthew 16:16, the Hebrew Matthew often implies Jesus is Messiah. Not only are all the Messianic prophecies cited in the Hebrew Matthew as in the Greek Matthew, but there are many other clear references. For example, John the Baptist tells Jesus he should be baptized by Jesus, obviously because Jesus was on a higher level. (Matt. 3:14.) Jesus is the light to shine to the Gentiles. (Matt. 4:16.) Jesus is "worshipped" without comment. (Matt.8:2.) John the Bap-



tists' followers ask if Jesus is the Christ, to which Jesus gives an implicit affirmative, citing the blind see, the lame walk, etc. (Matt. 11:1-5.) The Son of God is not merely akin to us. He alone knows the Father. (Matt. 11:22.) And on and on it goes. (See Matt. 21:9 "savior of the world"; Matt.23:10, "one is your Rabbi, Messiah."; Matt. 24:23.) Howard's motives are unclear, but his conclusion is misdirected.

In fact, in two respects the Hebrew Matthew is superior to the Greek Matthew in passages in which the Greek version make Jesus appear less than God or that Jesus is not good. .

First, in the Greek, Matt. 24:36 says that the time of the tribulation no one knows, "neither the son," but only the Father. If Jesus is equal to God, how can He not also know? However, in the Hebrew Matthew of Shem Tob it says "there is none who knows, not even the angels, but the Father only." Jesus does not exclude himself from knowing in the Hebrew Matthew. Thus, the Hebrew version has a text more open to Jesus being God while the Greek directly disproves an equality between Jesus and God the Father.

A similar troublesome verse in the Greek is Matt.19:17 (KJV): "Why callest me good? there is none good but one, that is God." This implies Jesus says it is wrong to call him good. God is alone good. However, the Hebrew Matthew has it: "Why do you ask about good? No man is good because God alone is good." Jesus does not exclude himself in the Hebrew Matthew.

Thus, we see our Greek Matthew has two serious flaws about Jesus' divinity that the Hebrew Matthew lacks.

---

*Proof of Antiquity of Shem Tob Hebrew Matthew*

The proof of its antiquity is multifaceted. Its variants are found in some very early Greek translations. Its variants are what early Christian bishops and leaders were quoting. Furthermore, the Greek majority text we use today and trace back to the 4th century clearly derived from a Hebrew text just like Shem Tob's *Gospel of Matthew*. We can deduce this because it is obvious in over eight places that the Greek translator mistook a single letter in Hebrew and then rendered the Greek equivalent. (Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (1995) at 226-28.)

For example, Jesus actually says in Hebrew "blessed are those who wait" but if you mistakenly read just one little letter of Hebrew, it comes out "blessed are those who mourn." (Matt. 5:4.) Likewise, Jesus at the Last Supper says one of them will "sell me" in Hebrew, but if you mistake just one little letter, it comes out "betray me." (Matt. 26:23.) The Shem Tob *Matthew* clearly demonstrates it is more original than the Greek version we depend on today.

The Shem Tob *Matthew* contains the obvious original substratum upon which our Greek Matthew is based. This means it is the translation closer to the Apostle Matthew than any other of which we know.

If we take the Shem Tob *Hebrew Matthew*, and restore some of the Hebrew Matthew mentioned by Jerome, then we are rediscovering the closest text to the original autograph of Matthew. When we do this exercise, we see the Hebrew Matthew is the only text that rescues Jesus from flagrant error in Matthew 23:35 (son of Barachias defect) and 27:9 (30 pieces prophecy incorrectly cited to Jeremiah). There are no Greek variants at all that provide any kind of escape. Hence, the Hebrew Matthew deserves serious attention.