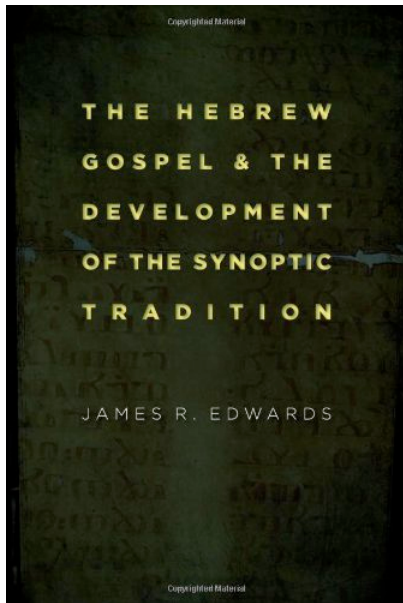


RBL 07/2010



Edwards, James R.

The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. Pp. 402. Paper. \$36.00.
ISBN 0802862349.

Timothy A. Friedrichsen
Denison, Iowa

“Nearly a century of NT scholarship was educated in virtual ignorance of the Hebrew Gospel” (255; cf. xxiii); James R. Edwards has provided a volume that for many will fill in the gaps of knowledge about the Hebrew Gospel’s contents and influence in the early Christian centuries. Edwards’s decade-long project begins with an introduction (xviii–xxxiv) in which he orients the reader toward the development of his “new paradigm, at least in part, for the resolution of the Synoptic problem” (xviii) and the breadth of modern scholarship on the Hebrew Gospel.

The opening chapter of the work, “References to a ‘Hebrew Gospel’ in Early Christianity” (1–43), presents all early Christian authors, from Papias (ca. 60–130) to Venerable Bede (ca. 673–735), who refer to the Hebrew Gospel (some more explicitly than others) but do not quote its text. Additionally, Edwards mentions “[four scholia] in the margins of Codex Sinaiticus” (40) and the “Islamic Hadith (ninth and tenth centuries [?])” (42, his bracketed question mark).

In his second chapter, “Quotations from the Hebrew Gospel in Early Christianity” (44–96), Edwards provides the reader the full texts from Ignatius, Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Jerome in which they purport to quote from the Hebrew Gospel. For each quotation of the Hebrew Gospel, the text is offered in the ancient author’s original

language in a footnote and with Edwards's translation in his text. He also provides all of these as well as the references from chapter 1 in his first appendix, "References to the Hebrew Gospel in the First Nine Centuries" (263–91). In this appendix he begins with *b. Šabb.* 116a–b, which he dates from the first Christian century. In his own presentation of this text (228–32), Edwards concludes that it is possibly a "polemic ... directed ... to two Jewish-Christian sects, the Ebionites and Nazarenes, and to the *Sifre Minim*, the Hebrew Gospel they read" (231), so that dating the text to "the third century" (232) seems rather likely; the proposal that "the historicity of the Talmudic story, at least in substance, ... [is from] the early 70s" appears too wishful.

Given the references and citations of the Hebrew Gospel, chapter 3, "Taking Stock of the Hebrew Gospel in Early Christianity" (97–124), assays the widespread knowledge of the Hebrew Gospel, its "authority" (e.g., 105) for interpretative questions of canonical texts, and its similarity to Luke, especially Special Luke, rather than a harmonizing of the Synoptic Gospels, which lends credibility to the proposal that the Hebrew Gospel is a source for Luke. The Hebrew Gospel is not a source for other canonical Gospels; most especially, canonical Matthew is not a translation of the Hebrew Gospel, as so often proposed in patristic literature as well as in some modern scholarship. To reject the theory that Hebrew Gospel compiles or harmonizes Synoptic texts, Edwards must dismiss occasions when the Hebrew Gospel appears to have material closer to Matthew and/or Mark than to Luke as material from the "more or less evangelical 'public domain'" (p. 69, on *Panarion* 30.13.4, similar to Matt 3:4 par. Mark 1:5–6; p. 75, on *Panarion* 22.4 on Matt 26:17 par. Mark 14:12). Synoptic scholars will, I believe, see more examples than these.

Edwards is now prepared to move to more specific consideration of the relationship of the Hebrew Gospel to the development of the Synoptic Gospels. Chapter 4, "Semitisms in the Gospel of Luke" (125–53; listed in appendix 2, 292–332), and chapter 5, "The Hebrew Gospel" (154–86), examine the many examples of Lukan Semitism, which are especially frequent in Special Luke. The theory that these Semitisms are to be explained by Luke's intentional imitation of the Septuagint is insufficient, for they are too frequent and not consistent in pattern or kind to Semitisms in the Septuagint. Rather, the Semitisms in Luke—which by and large reflect literal translation of a Hebrew *Vorlage*—are best explained by Luke's use of the Hebrew Gospel, which was written in Hebrew, not Aramaic.

Chapter 6, "The Neglect of the Hebrew Gospel in Christian Tradition" (187–208) deals with what must be counted as an embarrassment for Edwards's paradigm, namely, the lack of an extant copy of the Hebrew Gospel, which Edwards—and I am sure any scholar of early Christianity—hopes will still be found. Despite the lack of an extant copy,

Edwards is unforgiving of the bias he sees in the “Resistance to a Hebrew Ancestor in the Family” (194–208).

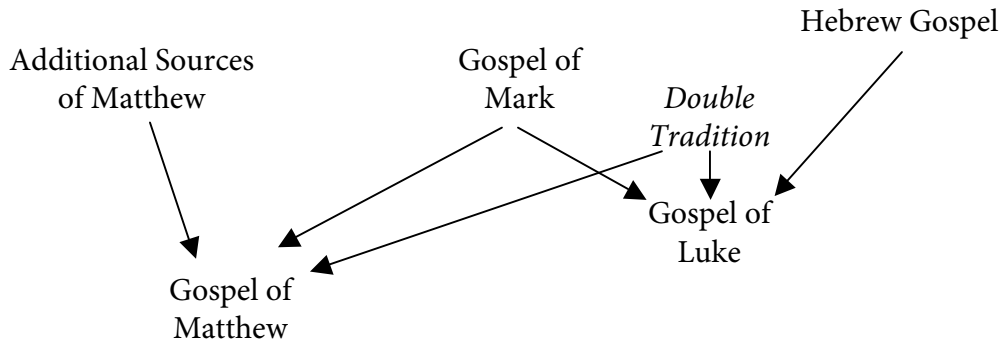
Edwards continues to develop his new paradigm of Synoptic relationships in chapter 7, “Adieu to ‘Q’” (209–42); for Edwards, the theory of Q “was birthed nearly fully grown” (212) in a mistranslation and misinterpretation of Papias by Schleiermacher. Since then, Q has taken on a life and industry of its own in the development of hypothetical editorial levels of this hypothetical source of (mostly) sayings of Jesus in Matthew and Luke but not Mark. Nevertheless, Edwards admits that these “177 verses” of material require an explanation (see 234–36 for his list, which is significantly shorter than most Synoptic scholars’ lists). Since Edwards sees no precedent for a Q-like document in late Judaism and early Christianity, he prefers the more neutral designation of these verses as “double tradition,” without a clear explanation of what sort of source is at the root of these major agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark.

The last chapter, “The Hebrew Gospel and the Gospel of Matthew” (243–58), argues that the Hebrew Gospel is not the Hebrew/Aramaic *Vorlage* of canonical Matthew, which was a mistaken attribution made already in patristic times due in part to the widespread and seemingly trustworthy tradition that the Hebrew Gospel was written by the apostle Matthew, after whom the First Gospel was named. Canonical Matthew is to be attributed to a Jewish-Christian author for a Jewish-Christian community, which is a similarity of background that canonical Matthew shares with the apostle Matthew. This First Gospel is more likely the end point of the Synoptic tradition and may have depended on Luke as one of his sources rather than vice versa (“Matthean Posteriority,” 245–52). In the end, Edwards does not include this dependence in the schematic of his paradigm (see below). I found it interesting that the great majority of texts listed by Edwards “that are best explained as developments of earlier Lukan texts” are from the double tradition (249–50).

In addition to the appendices already mentioned, Edwards considers “Luke 6:5 (D)” (333–35) in his third appendix. Codex Bezae places Luke 6:5 after verse 10 and reads at verse 5 instead a saying of Jesus to a man working on the Sabbath. Edwards first argues “in favor of its authenticity or antiquity” (334), then shows that some of its language is consistent with the Hebrew Gospel and Special Luke, concluding that it may have been added by a scribe/copyist “who held the Hebrew Gospel in high esteem” (335).

Edwards also provides selected bibliography (336–41) and helpful indices of modern authors (342–45), subjects (346–47), Scripture references (348–355), and other ancient writings (356–60).

The epilogue, “Summary Theses” (259–62) pulls together Edwards’ “23 theses, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet” (259; Ψ and ψ each get their own due), most of which have been included above. Edwards’s Synoptic solution is diagrammed as follows (262; cf. n. 1: “*italics indicate some doubt about source*”):



Many readers—this one among them—will appreciate the wealth of information about the Hebrew Gospel that Edwards gathers together and presents in great detail in this work. It is impossible to argue with such a wide-ranging work point by point, but I think that this work may generate a lot of discussion, because I am not convinced that the care and accuracy with which Edwards presents the patristic data about the Hebrew Gospel are as evident in his methodologies for evaluating their relationships to and influences on the Synoptic Gospels, most especially Luke. At the very least, not only is the lack of an extant copy of the Hebrew Gospel a problem, so also is the establishment of wide-ranging conclusions on the basis of quotations that, according to my count, represent only fifteen Synoptic verses (not counting “thematic parallels”; see the list on 110–11) out of a document of “2200 lines,” according to Nicephorus (22, 104, 290). In addition, it seems that Edwards ignores or quickly dismisses as “public domain” (above) non-Lukan material in the Hebrew Gospel—even redactional material from Matthew. I find Edwards’s mathematical calculations difficult to accept, especially when he does not take enough care to distinguish between “Special Luke” and “unique to Luke.” This is an important methodological distinction, for the latter can—and often does in Edwards’s work—refer to Luke’s redactional changes to Markan material. If Luke introduced Semitisms to Markan material, might he also have added Semitisms in Special Luke? Edwards would argue that this cannot explain the differences in the frequency of Semitisms in Special Luke compared to triple- and double-tradition material—according to his calculation, “nearly four times higher” (e.g., 152; cf. 142, 145: “almost a 400% increase”). In addition, on Edwards’s theory, Luke may have been inspired by the Hebrew Gospel to add Semitism to Mark, but the paucity of Hebrew Gospel material and the lack of careful distinctions make it difficult to assess the accuracy of Edwards’s statistical comparisons. In his *Q-adieu*, Edwards does not include some clearly Q material (e.g., the Lost Sheep,

Luke 15:4ff.) and gives no explanation for omission of Mark-Q overlap material from consideration. Moreover, even though I can agree that some work on the hypothetical source Q has become more speculative than seems judicious, Edwards does not challenge the Q hypothesis on the basis of its strongest underpinnings: Q no longer rests on Schleiermacher's (mis)use of Papias but rather on Markan priority (which he supports) and the independence of Matthew and Luke (which he does not deny, although he flirts with Matthew's dependence on Luke). I can hope with Edwards that a copy of the Hebrew Gospel surfaces, but until then, or at least until more careful study and argumentation is offered to substantiate Edwards's new Synoptic paradigm, I must remain grateful for the rich presentation of the Hebrew Gospel but quite unconvinced of this new paradigm.