DAVID CREECH

The Use of Scripture in the Apocryphon of John

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe
441

Mohr Siebeck

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament · 2. Reihe

441

David Creech

The Use of Scripture in the Apocryphon of John

A Diachronic Analysis of the Variant Versions

Mohr Siebeck

David Creech, born 1976; 1999 BA; 2002 MDiv; 2011 PhD; 2008–12 Program Director for Hunger Education for ELCA World Hunger; 2012–13 Teaching Fellow at Loyola University Chicago; since 2013 Assistant Professor of Religion at Concordia College, Moorhead.

ISBN 978-3-16-152983-2 eISBN 978-3-16-153808-7
ISSN 0340-9570 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe)

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at *http://dnb.dnb.de.*

The book is printed on non-aging paper by Gulde Druck in Tübingen and bound by Buchbinderei Nädele in Nehren.

Printed in Germany.

For Mom and Dad

Preface

This monograph is a slightly revised version of my doctoral dissertation submitted to the Department of Theology at Loyola University Chicago in August of 2011. The wise sage Qohelet tells us that "a threefold chord shall not be quickly broken" (Eccl 4:12, *NRSV*). Many strands made up the chord that supported me throughout the process of birthing this book. I would not have finished without the gracious help and encouragement of several key friends and colleagues.

Many thanks are due to Prof Dr. Jörg Frey for accepting this contribution into the WUNT II series. Thanks are also due to the editorial staff at Mohr Siebeck. This book could not have been completed without their helpful guidance and incredible patience.

I am also grateful to the Theology Department at Loyola University Chicago. I appreciated the collegial atmosphere and the open sharing of ideas. The faculty helped me hone my critical thinking and writing skills. Drs. Tom Tobin and Bob Di Vito served admirably on my dissertation committee, offering timely and incisive feedback. The manuscript was greatly strengthened by their input. I cannot thank my *Doktorvater*, Dr. Edmondo Lupieri, enough. He went above and beyond what can be reasonably asked of a director and provided just what I needed – feedback, ideas, even the gentle (perhaps sometimes too gentle) nudge forward – throughout the entire process. He has continued to be my greatest champion in the academy. The staff, especially Catherine Wolf and Marianne Wolfe, helped me manage and navigate the labyrinthine (and not so labyrinthine) university requirements. My cohort provided camaraderie and helped me grow ideas. Carl Toney, in particular, was a dear friend and sounding board.

The strongest strands of support continue to come from my family. Dad and Mom instilled in me from early on a love for the text and a desire to learn. My sisters and brother – Julie, Elizabeth, Jamie, and Jonathan – believed in me and offered regular encouragement. Finally, deepest thanks are to my kids, Ian, Ela, and Dylan. We all got much more out of this than we bargained for and I am grateful for your patience and endurance, and also for all the joy and laughter you bring.

David Creech
May 2017

Table of Contents

Preface VII

Chapter 1: Preliminaries 1

A. Introduction 1
B. History of Research 1
1. Origins and Classification of 'Gnosticism' 1
a. Four Perspectives on the Origins and Classification of Gnosticism 2
b. The Gnostics and Scripture 10
c. Assumptions and a Few Informed Decisions 11
2. The *Apocryphon of John* 16
a. The *Apocryphon of John* and Scripture: The *Status Quaestionis* 17
b. 'Diachronic' Analyses of the *Apocryphon of John* 21
C. Brief Overview of the Argument 27
1. Aims and Thesis 27
2. Chapter Summaries 27

Chapter 2: "Indeed He Said Through the Prophet" 29

A. Introduction 29
B. The Apocryphon and the Biblical Text: Two Common Misperceptions 30
1. Rejection of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures 30
a. Karen King: Deep Engagement with Scripture but Ultimately a Rejection of It 33
b. Gerard Luttikhuizen: Engagement with Scripture to Demonstrate Its Inadequacies 34
c. Alastair H. D. Logan: A Dispute about Proper Interpretation 35
2. Intentional Misreading of Scripture: Reverse or 'Protest' Exegesis 37
a. Intermittent Value Reversals 39
b. Scriptural Chestnuts 41
c. Inherent Meaning? 47
d. Criticism ≠ Rejection 48
e. Summary 50

C. The Biblical Text as Foundational....50
1. Biblical Theology in the *Apocryphon of John*....51
a. The Arrogant Boast....53
b. Summary....59
2. The *Apocryphon of John*'s Structural Dependence on the Biblical Text....59
a. The Structure of the *Apocryphon of John*....59
b. A Piece of Rewritten Scripture....61
3. Exegetical 'Proofs'....63
a. The 'Breath of Life'....64
b. Flesh of My Flesh!....65
c. The Repentance of God....66
4. Summary of Findings....67
D. Conclusion....67

Chapter 3: "Not as Moses Said"....69

A. Introduction....69
B. Moses the Unreliable Witness....69
1. The Rhetoric of Citation....70
2. Framing the Rejection: The Savior Laughs....72
C. Not as Moses Said… but Just as Moses Said....77
1. Lack of Substantial Disagreement....78
a. Adam's Trance: Sleep Need not Be Interpreted Literally....78
b. Noah's Companions....81
2. Disagreement on the Disagreement....82
a. Ialdabaoth Creates the Woman....83
3. Use of Existing Interpretations/Scripture Interpreting Scripture....86
a. Isaiah's Proof of the Nature of Adam's Trance....86
b. Noah in the Cloud....87
c. Sophia's Movement 'To and Fro'....88
D. Conclusion....90

Chapter 4: A Diachronic Analysis....91

A. Introduction....91
B. An Outline of the Parameters....92
1. Three Key Moments....92
2. The Text and Its Audience....93
a. Reconstructing Social Histories from Texts....93
b. The Geographical Spread of Ideas....97
C. The *Apocryphon of John* in the Second Century....101
1. The Shape of the *Apocryphon* circa 150 CE....101

2. The *Apocryphon of John* as Rewritten Scripture 104
3. The *Apocryphon of John* in Early Christian Communities 107
D. The *Apocryphon of John* after Irenaeus of Lyons 108
1. Irenaeus' Assault on 'Knowledge Falsely So-Called' 109
2. The Gnostic Response 111
a. Sophia's Repentance Revisited 112
b. Noah's Guiding Light 113
E. The *Apocryphon of John* at Nag Hammadi 114
1. Two Versions 114
2. The Continued Use of Scripture in the *Apocryphon* 116
a. Sethianization 116
b. The Aftermath of Creation 116
F. Conclusion 118

Bibliography 121

Index of Ancient Sources 135
A. Hebrew Bible and Septuagint 135
B. New Testament 136
C. Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha 137
D. Other Greek and Latin Authors 138
E. Nag Hammadi and Related Literature 141
Index of Modern Authors 145
Index of Subjects 147

Chapter 1

Preliminaries

A. Introduction

In the second and third centuries of the Common Era, diverse breeds of Christianity proliferated and engaged in rigorous debate about the essence of the nascent faith. In addition to debating basic understandings of God, Christ, the problem of evil, and so on, the various types of Christianity struggled to articulate the role of earlier texts and traditions, both sectarian and mainstream. In this pluriform and contentious context the *Apocryphon of John* emerged and evolved with its own distinct understanding of the Christian message. This study explores how the *Apocryphon* confronts both text and tradition in its presentation of Christianity.

B. History of Research

1. Origins and Classification of 'Gnosticism'[1]

For the last fifty or so years, the key debates in the study of the texts from Nag Hammadi have revolved around the origins and classification of the ancient religious movement that is commonly labeled 'Gnostic.'[2] Within these debates, how a given text or set of texts engage the Jewish scriptures is generally used in service of the questions of whence Gnosticism arose and/or what precisely Gnosticism was (if anything at all). Although I seek to answer a different set of questions in this monograph, several of my

[1] The summaries that follow are informed by Karen King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) and Michael Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). See also the helpful literature reviews of Alastair Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), xiii–xxiv; Simone Pétrement, *A Separate God: The Christian Origins of Gnosticism*, trans. Carol Harrison (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 1–25; and Carl B. Smith II, *No Longer Jews: The Search for Gnostic Origins* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 1–71.

[2] On my decision to continue the use of the terms 'Gnostic' and 'Gnosticism,' see pp. 13–15 below.

suppositions are dependent upon this discussion. A brief outline of the various positions is thus in order.

a. Four Perspectives on the Origins and Classification of Gnosticism

In 1957, the scholar of early Christianity R. McL. Wilson concluded that if scholars were to grasp "the development and mutual relationship of the various Gnostic sects," they would first have to establish a functional chronology and definition of the movement.[3] Just over fifty years later, in spite of major colloquia and numerous books and articles,[4] those tasks are still incomplete. There remain essentially four options for the origins and classification of Gnosticism: 1) a Christian heresy, born out of the Christian movement; 2) a product of oriental syncretism, later blended into earliest Christianity; 3) a fundamentally Jewish sect, later married to Christian ideas; and 4) a breed of Christianity, developing alongside other Christianities, later reified in an effort to define the boundaries of "normative" Christianity. Each will be briefly discussed in turn.

i. The Traditional Perspective: Gnosticism as a Derivation of or Deviation from Christianity

Until the nineteenth century, and continuing into the twentieth, the Church Fathers were our primary source of information on ancient Gnosticism.[5] Heresiologists, such as Irenaeus of Lyon,[6] Hippolytus of Rome,[7] Tertullian

---

[3] R. Mc.L. Wilson, "Gnostic Origins Again," *VC* 11 (1957): 93–110, here 109.

[4] The colloquia to which I refer are the 1966 colloquium in Messina, the proceedings of which were published in Ugo Bianchi, ed., *Le origini dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina, 13–18 Aprile 1966* (SHR 12; Leiden: Brill, 1967), the 1978 International Conference on the Texts from Nag Hammadi in Québec, published in Bernard Barc, ed., *Colloque International sur les Textes de Nag Hammadi (Québec, 22–25 août 1978)* (BHNC, Section "Études" 1; Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 1981), and the International Conference of Gnosticism at Yale (1978), archived in Bentley Layton, ed., *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978*, 2 vols. (SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1981). For further references, see the following bibliographies: David M. Scholer, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography, 1948–1969* (NHMS 1; Leiden: Brill, 1971); *idem*, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography, 1970–1994* (NHMS 32; Leiden: Brill, 1997); *idem*, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography, 1995–2006* (NHMS 65; Leiden: Brill, 2009). A number of the important figures contributing to the discussion and their books and articles are summarized below.

[5] For the critical editions and important secondary works on the ancient authors mentioned in this paragraph, see Hubertus Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, trans. Siegfried Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007). Generally accessible English translations of all the authors mentioned in this paragraph are available in the *ANF* and *NPNF* collections.

[6] The key work of Irenaeus is obviously *Adversus haereses.* The standard critical edition is A. Rousseau, L. Doutreau, C. Mercier, and B. Hemmerdinger, eds., *Contre les*

of Carthage,[8] and Epiphanius of Salamis,[9] wrote responses to what they saw as insidious challenges to their understanding of the Christian faith. Other writers, such as Clement of Alexandria[10] and Origen,[11] wrote treatises against various Gnostic teachers and movements, all the while incorporating some of their ideas. Still other Church Fathers, such as Eusebius of Caesarea, wrote histories of the Church with certain distinctive, antiheretical tendencies.[12] In general, up until the early twentieth century, scholars of early Christianity accepted the patristic assertion that the Gnos-

hérésies, 10 vols. (SC 100, 151, 152, 153, 210, 211, 263, 264, 293, 294; Paris: Cerf, 1965–1982).

[7] Hippolytus' major work is *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (critical edition: M. Marcovich, *Refutation of All Heresies* [PTS 25; New York: de Gruyter, 1986]).

[8] See esp. *Adversus Marcionem* (critical edition: E. Evans, trans. and ed., *Adversus Marcionem*, 2 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1972]), *Adversus Valentinianos* (critical edition: J. C. Fredouille, ed., *Contre les Valentiniens*, 2 vols. [SC 280, 281; Paris: Cerf, 1980–1981]), *De praescriptione haereticorum* (critical edition: R. F. Refoulé and P. de Labriolle, eds., *Traité de la prescription contre les hérétiques* [SC 46; Paris: Cerf, 1957]), *Scorpiace* (critical edition: G. Azzali Bernadelli, ed. *Scorpiace* [BPat 14; Florence: Nardini, 1990]).

[9] Epiphanius offers a 'medicine chest' to deal with various heresies in *Panarion (Adversus haereses).* The critical Greek text is Karl Holl, *Ancoratus. Panarion (haereses 1–33)* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915); the standard English translation is Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, 2 vols. (NHS 35, 36; Leiden: Brill, 1987–1994).

[10] Clement wrote against the Valentinian Theodotus in *Excerpta ex Theodoto* (critical editions: R. P. Casey, ed., *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria: Edited with Translation, Introduction and Notes* [London: Christophers, 1934] and F. Sagnard, ed., *Extraits de Théodote: texte grec, introduction, traduction et notes* [SC 23; Paris: Cerf, 1948]). Clement also cites many Gnostic teachers and works in his *Stromateis*, not all of them pejoratively. Clement even saw Christian Gnosis as an ideal (though his definition of Gnosis is distinct from his less 'orthodox' contemporaries – see Riemer Roukema, *Gnosis and Faith in Early Christianity*, trans. John Bowden [London: SCM, 1999], esp. 151–53).

[11] Origen has references to Gnostics scattered throughout his grand corpus. Especially valuable are Origen's commentary on John that interacts with an earlier commentary written by the Valentinian Heracleon and his response to Celsus (*Contra Celsum*) that contains some Gnostic fragments. The critical editions of Origen's commentary on John are E. Preuschen, ed., *Der Johanneskommentar* (GCS 10; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903) and C. Blanc, ed., *Commentaire sur saint Jean*, 5 vols. (SC 120, 157, 222, 290, 385; Paris: Cerf, 1964–1992). For *Contra Celsum*: M. Borret, ed., *Contre Celse*, 5 vols. (SC 132, 136, 147, 150, 227; Paris: Cerf, 1967–1976). The standard English translation is Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

[12] I refer here to Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica*, available in the Loeb Classical Library: Kirsopp Lake and J. E. L. Oulton, eds., *The Ecclesiastical History*, 2 vols. (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926–1932).

tic movement evolved out of Christianity as a distortion of true Christian faith.[13]

Though this perspective has fallen out of favor,[14] it does have some modern champions with formidable arguments.[15] First, of the evidence that survives, even that from Nag Hammadi, all the texts are Christian. One must strip away the Christian elements to reconstruct the putative pre-Christian document.[16] Second, and related, there is no pre-Christian evidence of Gnosticism.[17] The debates with Gnostics are limited to the second century CE and later,[18] the texts that survive are generally dated to the

[13] The oft-cited dictum of the learned Church historian Adolf von Harnack offers a one-line summary of this perspective: Gnosticism is essentially the "acute Hellenization of Christianity" (*History of Dogma*, trans. from 3rd German ed. [New York: Dover Publications, 1961], I: 226).

[14] Pheme Perkins (*Gnosticism and the New Testament* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 206 n.2), speaking specifically to the work of Simone Pétrement, is satisfied to offer only a one-line critique, asserting that the idea is "outdated." Birger Pearson ("Eusebius and Gnosticism," in *The Emergence of the Christian Religion*, ed. *idem* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], 147–68, here 150) caustically remarks that such a position "[flies] in the face of the primary evidence now available to scholarship."

[15] See esp. A. D. Nock, "Gnosticism," in *HTR* 57 (1964): 255–79; Simone Pétrement, *A Separate God*; Michel Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques: Codex de Berlin* (Sources Gnostiques et Manichéennes 1; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1984); Alastair Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*; and *idem*, *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006).

Edwin Yamauchi (*Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973]; "The Descent of Ishtar, the Fall of Sophia, and the Jewish Roots of Gnosticism," *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 [1978]: 143–75) argues strenuously that there was no pre-Christian Gnosticism. Although some of his statements may seem to suggest that he is arguing for an essentially Christian origin of Gnosticism, it appears that he understands Gnosticism to be the confluence of Iranian, Jewish, and Christian elements.

[16] Of the possible exceptions (i.e., texts that betray little or no Christian influence), such as *Apoc. Adam*, *Par. Shem*, and the Hermetic Corpus, it can be argued that these have been de-Christianized or that the Christian elements have been intentionally obscured.

[17] Argued forcefully by Yamauchi, *op. cit.*

[18] It is also worth noting that when the disputes emerge in the second century, they are almost exclusively intra-Christian debates. If Gnosticism is a Jewish or pagan phenomenon, why then is there so little evidence of a dispute? On the evidence of a late Jewish response to the Gnostic doctrine of 'Two Powers,' see Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (SJLA 25; Leiden: Brill, 1977). Our only evidence of pagan assaults on Gnosticism comes from Plotinus, *Ennead* 2.9, though it is clear in Porphyry's report that all Gnostics known to Plotinus and himself were Christians. Of course, earlier, in the last third of the second century CE, Celsus had lambasted Gnostics, and he too thought they were Christians.