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INTERPRETER ANCIENT SCRIPTURE AND TEXTS SERIES 1

TEXTUAL AND COMPARATIVE
EXPLORATIONS IN

1 & 2

ENOCH



SAMUEL ZINNER

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
UNDEREMPHASIZED PARALLELS BETWEEN THE
ACCOUNT OF JESUS' BAPTISM
IN THE GOSPEL OF THE HEBREWS/EBIONITES
AND THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS AND AN
OVERLOOKED INFLUENCE FROM 1 ENOCH 96:3:
"AND A BRIGHT LIGHT SHALL ENLIGHTEN YOU,
AND THE VOICE OF REST
YOU SHALL HEAR FROM HEAVEN"

In the Gospel of the Ebionites we find the following account of Jesus' baptism; we underline the textual features that will be examined in more depth later in the body of this chapter:

And as he came out of the water the heavens opened, and he saw the holy spirit descending under the form of a dove, and entering into him. And a voice was heard from heaven: "You are my beloved son, and in you am I well pleased." And again (*kai palin*): "This day have I begotten you." And suddenly a great light (*phōs mega*) illuminated (*perielampse*) that place.

The same event is narrated in the Gospel of the Hebrews, which in our opinion represents merely a different recension of the same text that is known as the Gospel of the Ebionites. For present purposes it is immaterial which recension might be the earlier one:

And it came to pass when the lord was come up out of the water, the whole fount of the holy spirit descended upon him and rested on him and said to him: "My son, in all the prophets I was waiting for you that you should come and I should rest in you. For you are my rest, you are my first-begotten son (*tu es filius meus primogenitus*) who reigns forever.

As is well known, especially after the discovery of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas (we refer to logion 2), Clement of Alexandria records in his *Stromateis* 2.9 and 5.14 that the Gospel of the Hebrews contained a saying of Jesus that culminated in the statement, "he that has reigned shall rest."

What is striking here is that both themes of resting and reigning appear in the Gospel of the Hebrews' account of Jesus' baptism. This will gain in significance as we proceed below.

Several underemphasized parallels between the Gospel of the Ebionites and the Letter to the Hebrews 1:5 become apparent once we examine them in comparative columns:

Table 17.1

Hebrews 1	Gospel of the Ebionites
5 For to what angel did God ever say, <u>"You are my son,</u> <u>today I have begotten you?"</u> <u>And again (kai palin),</u> "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"?	And a voice was heard from heaven: <u>"You are my beloved son,</u> and in you I am well pleased. <u>And again (kai palin):</u> <u>"This day have I begotten you."</u>

The first parallel is thematic, namely, "God ... say[s]" and "a voice ... from heaven." The second parallel is that what God and the voice say in the two texts is virtually the same, "You are my (beloved) son." Third, both texts contain the two components "and again" and "This day I have begotten you," although the order is reversed in the two documents.

If we set Hebrews 1:6 beside an element of the baptism account from the Gospel of the Hebrews, the following similarity becomes apparent:

Table 17.2

Hebrews 1	Gospel of the Hebrews
6 When yet again (<i>otan de palin</i>), he brings <u>the first-born</u> into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."	you are my <u>first-begotten</u> son

To return to the prominence of the themes of resting and reigning in the fragments of the Gospel of the Hebrews, in light of the parallels presented above between the Gospel of the Hebrews/Ebionites and the Letter to the Hebrews, it is significant that in the latter text reigning is a prominent theme (see 1:3, 8; 8:1), and even more so is the trope of "rest" (3:11, 18; 4:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11). In our view there is clearly a *textual* relationship between Hebrews 1:5 and the Gospel of the Ebionites. However, we see no need to posit that the Ebionite text has been influenced

by the Letter to the Hebrews. Rather, a more likely scenario is that the Gospel of the Ebionites independently preserves elements of a quite ancient Jewish-Christian collection of testimonia concerning the sonship of Jesus that presupposed an angelic, or better, *archangelic* christology, and that the Letter to the Hebrews is responding to this testimonial list, but turning it on its head by arguing that its contents actually demonstrate that the son was not an angel. The Gospel of the Ebionites therefore likely preserves elements from a Jewish-Christian tradition that is older than the Letter to the Hebrews. In this scenario, the Gospel of the Ebionites, even if it was composed later than the synoptic gospels and is dependent upon them, nevertheless contains independent materials that predate and/or are contemporary with the synoptic gospels. The “apocryphal” text would therefore be simultaneously primary and secondary with regard to the synoptic gospels, both contemporary (by virtue of its preservation of independent archaic materials) and later (by virtue of its later overall final historical composition). In any case, the synoptic gospels are also a combination of primary and secondary traditions. The same scenario may apply to the Gospel of Thomas, which might contain both early and late components at once, even in an interfused modality.

According to Epiphanius (*Panarion* 14.5 and 16.4), the Ebionites “deny that he (Jesus) was a man,” and “They say that he was not begotten of God the father, but created as one of the archangels ... and that he rules over the angels...” However, according to the Gospel of the Ebionites, Jesus was indeed divinely “begotten” as a “son” at his baptism. Epiphanius is therefore exaggerating and his intention is merely to insinuate that the Ebionites do not hold to what he considers the orthodox understanding of Jesus’ divine sonship. Epiphanius does not mean to imply that they did not use any language at all about Jesus being God’s begotten son. The main difference between Epiphanius’ and the Ebionites’ beliefs in this regard was that the former held Jesus to be eternal and therefore uncreated, whereas the Ebionites believed that Jesus was created by God as the highest archangel, a belief paralleled rather precisely in Philo’s *On the Confusion of Tongues* (146), which refers to God’s “first-born word, the eldest of his angels, ... the great archangel of many names.” Since the Ebionites are said to hold that Jesus is the greatest archangel who rules over the angels, strictly speaking they did not hold to an *angelic* christology, but to an “*archangelic*” christology, which might also be called a supra-angelic christology. By contrast, Philo assigns both categories, the angelic and the archangelic, to the divine Logos. However, Philo specifies that the Logos is “the eldest” of the “angels,” which might simply imply the

status of “archangel,” so that in the final analysis it may be possible that Philo’s and the Ebionites’ beliefs were essentially the same, apart from the Ebionite interest in the person of Jesus. Therefore, the testimonia behind the Letter to the Hebrews 1 and the Gospel of the Ebionites/Hebrews may have been intended to demonstrate that the “son” was the archangelic ruler over the angels. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews apparently misunderstood his opponents’ belief, not recognizing the importance of their distinction between angels and archangels.

It remains for us at this stage to point out a striking isomorphism shared especially between 1 Enoch and the Gospel of the Ebionites, and to a lesser but not unimportant extent with the Gospel of the Hebrews:

Table 17.3

1 Enoch 96:3	Gospel of the Ebionites	Gospel of the Hebrews
And a bright light shall enlighten you, And the voice of rest you shall hear from heaven.	b) And suddenly a great light illuminated that place. a) And a voice was heard from heaven.	 the holy spirit ... said ... rest

The co-incidences presented above between 1 Enoch 96:3 and the Gospel of the Ebionites are quite arresting, and we find it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Enochic verse has not directly impacted the phraseology and events described in the Ebionite text. The component of “rest” in the same baptism story in the version found in the Gospel of the Hebrews arguably adds even more weight to the likelihood that the texts arose in an Enochic matrix. Curiously, in 1 Enoch 96:1 we find an equivalent of the trope of reigning, namely, the “lordship” that the “righteous” will “have over” all “the sinners.” Perhaps in view of the “spirit” and “voice” in the accounts of Jesus’ baptism we should cite from 1 Enoch 91:1 and correlate it with some features from the Gospel of the Hebrews:

Table 17.4

1 Enoch 91:1	Gospel of the Hebrews
For the word calls me, And the spirit is poured out upon me.	b) and said to him a) the whole fount of the holy spirit descended upon him

Might there be an allusion to Enoch the Son of Man, or at least an influence of Enochic terminology, in the accounts of Jesus’ baptism in the Gospel of the Hebrews and/or the Gospel of the Ebionites? In 1 Enoch 71:14 God or an angel (the identity is not clear), speaks to the ascended and transformed Enoch, and what is said is comparable in varying degrees to what we find in the two Jewish-Christian gospels under examination:

Table 17.5

1 Enoch 71:14	Gospel of the Ebionites
And he came to me and greeted me with his voice, and said unto me, “You are the Son of Man who is born unto righteousness, And righteousness abides over you....	And a voice was heard from heaven: You are my beloved son....

Table 17.6

1 Enoch 71:14	Gospel of the Hebrews
And he came to me and greeted me with his voice, and said unto me, “You are the Son of Man who is born unto righteousness, And righteousness abides over you....	the holy spirit ... said to him.... you are my first-begotten son ... the holy spirit ... rested upon him

In addition to the above correspondences, we can note that the Gospel of the Hebrews’ notion of the holy spirit resting permanently or definitively in the son seems to overlap semantically somewhat with 1 Enoch 71:14, “the righteousness of the Head of Days forsakes you not,” and verse 16, “since righteousness never forsakes you ... they shall not be separated from you forever and ever and ever.” Arguably there is also a semantic interface of sorts between the Gospel of the Hebrews’ “rest” and the “peace” of the transfigured Son of Man that will last “forever” according to 1 Enoch 71:15 and 16. In conclusion, while not overly meaningful, nevertheless it is worth documenting that the notion of “forever” that closes the Gospel of the Hebrews’ account of Jesus’ baptism is paralleled in 1 Enoch 71:15, 16, and 17.