

THE DIATESSARON RUSE

or

HOW THE HEBREW GOSPEL WAS ERASED

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ABSTRACT

Tatian, a second-century Christian apologist, is prominent for three things: For a work entitled *Oration to the Greeks*, for heresy, and for a gospel harmony known as the *Diatessaron*. While scholars commonly ascribe Tatianic authorship to the latter, a closer look at the evidence renders the claim suspect. Only a disregard of the historical context, its spiritual ramifications, and the emblematic role of Rome would produce such an admission. A few simple considerations suggest that Tatian was the scapegoat who provided a pretext for elegantly quashing the Hebrew Gospel.

1. INTRO: TEXTUAL CRITICISM

1.1 THE BELOVED FALLACY

A common disease of textual critics can be illustrated by a fictive allegory:

Manuscript history can be likened to a man who rose early in the morning and sowed one plant of good wheat in his field. At noon, the enemy came to the field and sowed ninety-nine plants of false wheat.¹

¹ Paraphrase of Mt 13:24–30 and Lk 15:3–7.

It is hard work to root out the illusion that 5,000 manuscripts have preserved the Nazarene writings. However, we are advised to let the false witnesses grow together with the faithful ones lest we harm the wheat by our efforts; we are assured the tares are burned at last.

In the *Parable of the Weeds* the servants recognize the false wheat by its fruit, whereas most scholars ignore the fruit and consequently don't discern the weed.

The Byzantine text which emerged during the Nicene Apostasy² led to the persecution and death of 60 million people.³ Which text supports Romish doctrines best? The Byzantine.

But the darnel not only caused physical death; it secures spiritual death too. A look through today's social media, Christian bookshops, and theological journals reveals a counterfeit which has been embraced by billions, and that for almost two millennia.

Justification through rebirth,⁴ emphasized by the early witnesses, has been blurred and replaced by 'faith in Jesus.' The Jewish plant, sown three hundred years prior to Gentile Nicea, was free from antinomian, Trinitarian, and anti-Judaic insertions; it was pure. Yet the delayed seed was contaminated, and manuscript history attests to the steady increase of its poisonous nature.

1.2 THE AMENDED APPROACH

We may glean valuable information from polemical utterances such as this one:

The Gospel according to the Hebrews and the Gospel attributed to Peter and Thomas were wholly repudiated [by the ancients] who asserted that they were jointly written by heretics.⁵

Rome's portrayal in Scripture is not flattering. As the final Gentile power prior to the millennium, she is linked to idolatry and sketched as serving the fallen cherub.⁶ Philip

² Anticipated by Paul in 2 Thes 2:3 as the *apostasia* (ἀποστασία), i.e. the Constantinian Apostasy.

³ 50 million as per conservative estimates, 150 million as per liberal. See the research of D. Plaisted, *Estimates of the Number Killed by the Papacy in the Middle Ages and Later* (Chapel Hill, 2006), 19–43.

⁴ That is, water and spirit immersion. See for instance *Rev.* 1:55, 69 or *Jn* 3:4–5 in the *Pepysian Text*; the earliest MSS also attest Unitarianism and Torah observance.

⁵ Philip Sidetes, 430 CE. Quoted from J. Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, 2009), 39.

⁶ See *Dan* 7:7–8, 25; *Rev* 12:9; 13:1–2; 17:3–4.

Sidetes, who voiced the above statement, seems to be a worthy envoy: Not only was he commended by Cyril of Alexandria, but he was also befriended with Jew hater John Chrysostom and a candidate for the patriarchate of Constantinople.

Therefore, correctly understood, his remark shows us what to focus on: We must heed the good news of the Jews, not the good news of the Greeks. We must restore the *Gospel of the Hebrews* and the *Gospel of Peter* – the *Gospel of Thomas*⁷ we have.

A witness that shares features with the Hebrew Gospel is the so-called *Diatessaron*.⁸

2. THE DIATESSARON

2.1 THE UNKNOWN AUTHOR

When its authorship was first attributed to him, it would have been difficult for Tatian to object since he was dead – in fact, he had been dead for 150 years.⁹

Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Origen, and Jerome, all of which refer to Tatian or his *Oration to the Greeks* never mention a *Diatessaron*. Also Ephrem, in his commentary, never mentions the title *Diatessaron* or refers to Tatian by name. Nor does Codex Fuldensis, the Papyrus Gospel, or the Liège text provide a title or an author.¹⁰ For one and a half century after its alleged composition there is no word about a Diatessaron, and yet we are informed how Tatian did it. Relating to a supposed Diatessaronic fragment,¹¹ Bruce Metzger observes:

Tatian went about composing his *Diatessaron* with great diligence. Probably, he worked from four separate MSS, one of each of the Gospels; and as he wove together phrases, now from this Gospel and now that, he would no doubt cross out those phrases in the

⁷ Another Pseudepigraphon quashed by Rome; it contained the *Logia* listed by Mattai in Hebrew. The Coptic version has been successfully demonized as Gnostic, Manichean, and even Taoist. For the Hebrew substrata, see J. Gebhardt-Klein, “Evidence for a Semitic-Language (Hebrew or Aramaic) Original behind the Coptic Gospel of Thomas,” 2022, www.academia.edu/81906379.

⁸ E.g. besides mentioning a light resting above the Jordan at Yeshua’s baptism, the heavenly voice says, “Today I have begotten you” (Lk 3:22), and the Jews lament, “Woe, woe to us” (Lk 23:48).

⁹ As per Encyclopedia Britannica, Tatian died in 173 CE; Petersen estimates between 180–190 CE. *Tatian’s Diatessaron* (Leiden, 1994), 72.

¹⁰ As the Latin editor, so is the editor of the Arabic translation dependent on Eusebius for both the work’s title and its author. For the dualism of the Greek ‘Diatessaron’ and the Syriac ‘Gospel’ see F. Watson, “Harmony or Gospel? On the Genre of the (So-called) Diatessaron,” in *The Gospel of Tatian*, ed. M. Crawford (London, 2019), 69–91.

¹¹ A Greek fragment discovered in 1933 at *Dura Europos* on the Euphrates.

MSS from which he was copying. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand how he was able to put together so successfully a cento of very short phrase from four separate documents.¹²

Providing that *a)* the portrayed fragment is ‘Diatessaronic,’ and *b)* that Tatian is the author, and *c)* that he had the four gospels, it is reasonable to propound the above; the only problem is that neither *a)*, nor *b)*, nor *c)* are given.

2.2 THE UNKNOWN GOSPELS

In 160 CE, Justin felt it was necessary to inform his readership that Peter and John were apostles – a century after the gospels’ alleged creation and circulation:

He changed the name of Peter, one of the apostles [...] moreover, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ.¹³

In vain do we look for quotes from Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John prior to 180 CE,¹⁴ and in vain do we seek canonical NT scraps before that date.¹⁵ Neither Barnabas nor Clement, nor any other contemporary such as Ignatius, Polycarp, or Hermas ever allude to the canonicals by name. We may scrutinize one decade after another, yet we won’t find a single reference to the synoptics or John. In c. 160 CE, Justin Martyr cites two hundred Messianic sayings without ever naming the corresponding book,¹⁶ and the reason is *not* the anonymity of the gospels, but that they had not been compiled.

If Justin, who died around 165 CE, didn’t know the four gospels, then it is unlikely that his pupil Tatian knew them.

¹² B. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York, 2005), 133.

¹³ *Dial.* 106.3; 81.4. While John the Elder wrote his gospel in 98 CE, it wasn’t circulated widely; Justin only knew the Book of Revelation.

¹⁴ The few quotes that closely agree with our gospels don’t prove that they existed.

¹⁵ As for P52, the J. Rylands Library states: “Recent research points to a date nearer to 200 AD, but there is as yet no convincing evidence that any earlier fragments from the NT survive.” [St. John Fragment \(The University of Manchester Library\)](#).

¹⁶ Justin Martyr was not in the habit of being ambiguous; he cites the Tanakh two hundred times and in half of the cases he introduces the quotes with phrases such as ‘Isaiah records’ (*Dial.* 63.2), ‘from the Book of Joshua’ (*Dial.* 62.4), or ‘in the Book which is entitled Exodus’ (*Dial.* 59.2). For a thorough investigation of Justin’s NT quotes see W. Cassels, *Supernatural Religion* (Toronto, 1879), 247–346; cf. J. Giles, *Hebrew and Christian Records*, vol. 2 (London, 1877), 117–37. For more recent, that is, more degenerate scholarship see J. Verheyden, “Justin’s Text of the Gospels,” in *The Early Text of the New Testament*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger (Oxford, 2014), 313–35.

Once the reputed heretic was dead, we meet the reputed authors of the canonicals in 185 CE. Since their supposed publication a whole century had elapsed during which they were never mentioned nor quoted. Now, for the first time ever they are indeed cited and we are given their names while Irenaeus takes care to explain to us why there must be exactly four.¹⁷

Even if we assume a late date for Tatian's death, shall we seriously propose that he availed himself of some copies of the newly published MSS and then combined them?

2.3 THE UNKNOWN HARMONY

The term *Diatessaron* is first mentioned in 325 CE. It was the time of Nicea, a turning point in history and the antechamber of the Dark Ages. The tenets of orthodoxy became more defined and any departure from the imperial decrees were met with civil punishments – the hunt for heretics had begun.¹⁸

While previously called a *follower* of the Encratites,¹⁹ now Tatian was the *founder* of them, at least if we want to trust Eusebius:

But their original founder, Tatian, formed a certain combination and collection of the Gospels, I know not how, to which he gave the title *Diatessaron*.²⁰

We only have copies of Eusebian works but no autographs. As a result, changes in line with orthodoxy would likely go undetected. But even if the quote is authentic, why lend undue credence to it?

The first detailed reference to our text comes 130 years later, in 453 CE:

He [Tatian] composed the Gospel which is called Diatessaron, cutting out the genealogies and such other passages as show the Lord to have been born of the seed of David after the flesh.²¹ This work was in use not only among persons belonging to his

¹⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 3.11.8. The fourfold gospel was unpopular among the Syrians. It was dubbed *Evangelion da-Mepharreshē* ('Gospel of the Separated') and replaced their text only in the 5th century.

¹⁸ P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3 (New York, 1891), 67.

¹⁹ By Irenaeus around 180 CE, *Adv. haer.* 1.28.1. The Encratites refrained from marriage, eating meat, and drinking wine.

²⁰ *Hist. eccl.* 4.29.6. I omitted, "and which is still in the hands of some," a phrase which tacitly hints at confiscation. Still 140 years later, the Syriac scribe explains that the 'Diatessaron' is the *Evangelion da-Mehalletē* ('Gospel of the Mixed') since otherwise no one would have known what it was.

²¹ The 'Diatessaronic witnesses' include both the genealogies and nativities which affirm Yeshua's Davidic descent. The genealogies, created in 170 CE, were only absent in the Hebrew Gospel; the

sect, but also among those who follow the apostolic doctrine, as they did not perceive the mischief of the composition, but used the book in all simplicity on account of its brevity. And I myself found more than 200 such copies held in respect in the churches in our parts. All these I collected and put away, and I replaced them by the Gospels of the four Evangelists.²²

Accordingly, unless he was in the sect, the revered deacon at the Edessan Church who wrote, *Not all who are living are alive, nor are all those who are buried dead*,²³ must have been without spiritual discernment. And while his lofty genius jumps off every page, neither Ephrem nor Aba nor Aphrahat nor anyone else in Syria ever perceived “the mischief of the composition” nor its Encratite elements; and this was because the narrative was briefer (i.e. less interpolated).²⁴

Put another way, while Tatian enjoyed a heretical career for 300 years in the West, the Syrians enjoyed a gospel for 300 years in the East without knowing the reputed author nor the title Diatessaron nor the supposed ascetical content – for them it was simply *the Gospel*.²⁵ In fact, they had used it already for 400 years because the *Doctrine of Addai* describes first-century Edessa:

A large multitude of people assembled day by day and came to the prayer of the service, and to the reading of the Old and New Testament, of the Diatessaron.²⁶

Since the tract goes on to pair the Diatessaron with *the Gospel*,²⁷ the anachronism imposes a question: Why would a fifth-century redactor insert Diatessaron unless the original document read *Evangelion da-Mehalletē* (“Gospel of the Mixed”)?²⁸ And if it read,

nativity was simply less interpolated. D. Pastorelli, “The genealogies of Jesus in Tatian’s Diatessaron,” in *Infancy Gospels*, ed. C. Clivaz (Tübingen, 2011), 216–30.

²² Theodoret, *Haer. Fab. Comp.* 1.20.

²³ Ephrem, *Comm. Diat.* 15.12.

²⁴ For an asinine list of “readings that betray Encratite tendencies,” see B. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament* (Oxford, 1977), 34–5. If needed, Metzger would detect ascetic readings in Epicurean works. While mistakenly assuming Tatianic authorship, Harris concludes correctly: “The case against Tatian on the ground of tampering with the Scriptures for doctrinal ends is an unproved case.” J. Rendel Harris, *The Diatessaron of Tatian* (London, 1890), 39.

²⁵ This situation is baffling; yet it appears the scholarly world is happy with the story. For evidence of non-Tatianic authorship, see Naomi Koltun-Fromm, “Re-imagining Tatian: The Damaging Effects of Polemical Rhetoric,” *J ECS* 16 (2008): 1–30.

²⁶ G. Phillips, ed., *The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle* (London, 1876), 34.

²⁷ *Ib.* 44.

²⁸ The term *Evangelion da-Mehalletē* is found in Syriac literature only from the fifth century onwards.

‘Gospel of the Mixed,’ why would he supplant it unless the term could also apply to the Gospel used in first-century Syria (unlike ‘Diatessaron’)?

We may well remember that the mainstream gospels were only extant from 170 CE onwards, and only then were labels such as *da-Mepharreshē* and *da-Mehalletē* needed to distinguish the 4 from the 1. When portraying the gospel reading in the Doctrine of Addai, a fifth-century author could have used no other term than *Evangelion da-Mehalletē* – that was the original wording. However, since this implied that the ‘Gospel of the Mixed’ was the only gospel read in those days, the editor decided to substitute *Diatessaron* for it (in the hope it would be buried as an absurd interpolation without further inquiry) – it was the lesser of ‘two evils.’

2.4 THE COMMENTARY OF EPHREM THE SYRIAN (c. 360)

While we hold that Ephrem commented on the *Diatessaron*, we rarely see explanations as to why he omits the term ‘Diatessaron’ as well as its alleged author Tatian. Given the monumental effort of interweaving gospel accounts, one would expect a word of recognition from a deacon of the Edessan church, yet we only encounter silence.

The supposed Diatessaronic fragment²⁹ referenced by Metzger does indeed exhibit harmonistic features, but Ephrem’s commentary does not. Not a single harmonistic reading can be found in *Chester Beatty MS 709*, the Syriac text which contains the commentary. All the cited pericopae are familiar standalone verses, and while commenting at times on the original Greek,³⁰ the only authors Ephrem ever mentions are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

It is furthermore remarkable that he intensely discusses the Matthean and Lukan genealogies³¹ which were meant to be absent in the Diatessaron and a reason for its confiscation. Yet despite these glaring contradictions we are expected to be satisfied with this:

²⁹ A Greek fragment discovered in 1933 at *Dura Europos* on the Euphrates.

³⁰ Ephrem, *Comm. Diat.* 2.17.

³¹ Ephrem’s attestation that Yosef and Miryam were from David’s house shows that the passages about Yeshua’s Davidic descent were present (*Comm. Diat.* 1.25–26).

Although Ephrem does not mention Tatian by name, there is no doubt but that his commentary is essentially based on the Diatessaron, since its sequence and readings are in agreement with other witnesses to the Diatessaron.³²

We do hope that Carmel McCarthy is not the only expert. Has it ever occurred to anyone that ‘the other witnesses’ came later?

2.4.1. THE ADDENDUM

The most important folio of the Syriac *Chester Beatty* MS 709 is probably the last one. It contains an appendix entitled ‘The Evangelists,’ and has, according to McCarthy, “no link with what has preceded.”³³

Indeed, it has no link to a commentary on a harmony. It only links perfectly to a commentary on the four gospels. McCarthy proceeds:

This fact [the ‘disconnected’ paragraph], together with the nature and style of its contents, suggests that its authenticity should be questioned.³⁴

Does the ‘nature and style of its contents’ question the authenticity of the coda or the claim that Ephrem exegeted a compound gospel? The section merits a full quotation:

The Evangelists

The words of the apostles are not in agreement because they did not write the Gospel at the same time. They did not receive the command like Moses, on tablets, but, as the prophet has said, *I will give them a covenant, not like this one, but my Law in their spirit, and I will write it on their heart.* [Various] reasons summoned them, and they wrote.

Matthew wrote it in Hebrew, and it was then translated into Greek. Mark followed Simon Peter. When he went to Rome, [the faithful] persuaded him [to write] so that they would remember the tradition, lest it be forgotten after a long time. He wrote what he had grasped. Luke began with the baptism of John. Since one had spoken of his incarnation and of his kingdom springing from David, and the other [had begun] with Abraham, John came and found that their words were proclaiming many things,

³² C. McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem’s Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron* (Oxford, 1993), 6, fn. 2.

³³ *Ib.* 344, fn 1.

³⁴ *Ib.* 344.

for they had composed genealogies showing that he was a son of man. Consequently, he wrote that had been not just a man, but, *In the beginning was the Word*.³⁵

Ephrem begins his tailpiece by noting disagreement between the gospels, a fact which is never an issue in a harmony because the compiler opts for one version. The reason Ephrem expands on conflicting parallel passages is not a commentary on a text devoid of them, but a commentary on a text replete with them – a commentary on the four distinct gospels. And since he wasn't dumb (as today's academic bulk), he commenced his exegesis with the beginning and not with the end. He did not start with the crucifixion but with the verse that takes us back to day one when G-d said, "Light be!"

Whether Ephrem's anti-Judaic stance led him to write on the **4** rather than on the **1** is a moot point. Crucial is that he did, but not in a consecutive way. While omitting repetitions, all the events covered in the canonicals were ordered chronologically and then discussed. The pseudepigraphical gospel harmony dubbed 'Diatessaron' would only emerge two centuries later.

2.5 "AND THE DIATESSARON WAS MADE FLESH"

When the 'heretical Diatessaron' was first brought to the public's attention in 325 CE, it didn't exist. Neither did it exist in the days of Aphrahat, Epiphanius, or Theodoret. It was a mere label, employed to demonize and seize the one Gospel which had been cherished in Syria since the mid-first century.

Given the successful purge, the Diatessaron could have well remained a ghost. All copies had been quashed it seems and no Diatessaron was left – the ruse was perfect.

It is impossible to trace the exact circumstances, but by the sixth century, Ephrem's chronological commentary on the four gospels was known in the West and provided the pattern for a blend called *Codex Fuldensis*. Now, four hundred years after its alleged creation by Tatian, Bishop Victor found an Old Latin Diatessaron. As a lover of ancient MSS, he replaced the text with the Vulgate and then destroyed his precious find (by mistake; or he lost it again by mistake).³⁶

It was the sole product of Rome, but it killed two birds with one stone. 'Proof' at last: A copy of the *Diatessaron* had been rescued; the harmony which was graciously

³⁵ McCarthy, op. cit. 344.

³⁶ Jerome's Vulgate was rejected for over a thousand years by the descendents of the Nazarenes, e.g. the Waldenses, Albigenses, Cathari, etc. who only read the Itala; they were branded 'heretics' and exterminated.

replaced by the ‘holy tetrad’; the text Mar Ephrem commented on. Later ‘witnesses’ employed the same blueprint but were based on other MSS, some older, some younger.

No one would question the narrative anymore. Having Ephrem’s work at disposal, it was a simple cut-and-paste job.

This compound gospel known as the ‘Diatessaron’ (a meaningless Popish forgery) has gained a lot of attention; the gospel it supplanted hasn’t.

3. THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE HEBREWS

In 383 CE, after referencing the very first gospel ever written, i.e. the one composed in Hebrew by Mattai in 40 CE, aka the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*,³⁷ Jerome describes the corruption of the Greek ‘Gospel of Matthew’ and hints at the remedy:

It is marked by discrepancies,³⁸ and now that the stream is distributed into different channels we must go back to the fountainhead.³⁹

One doesn’t clean up Greek Matthew with Greek MSS. Jerome alludes to consulting the original source, evidently the Hebrew MS which had been dispersed into ‘different channels,’ to wit, into the synoptics.⁴⁰

There are 75 ancient attestations to the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*.⁴¹ If we were to restore it, we would obtain eyewitness reports of Yeshua’s life, made by the Twelve who had been present during the events (complemented by input from Markos, Lukos, and Eleazar).

³⁷ It was a name descriptive of the readers for whom it was prepared or amongst whom it circulated. The original title was probably *The Gospel* (הבשורה), to which were added the various labels under which it was known amongst different groups, e.g. *of the Nazarenes, of the Ebionites, of the Egyptians*, etc. It was also called ‘The Gospel of the Apostles’ and since Kefa was the apostle to the Hebrews, ‘The Gospel of Peter.’

³⁸ For instance, the erroneous reading of ‘Jeremiah’ in Mt 27:9. The Hebrew correctly attributes the thirty-shekel prophecy to Zechariah. G. Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Macon, 1995), 143.

³⁹ Hoc certe cum in nostro sermone discordat, et diversos rivulorum tramites ducit: uno de fonte quaerendum est (*Praefatio in Quattuor Evangelia*, addressed to Pope Damasus).

⁴⁰ Already Lessing argued for the Hebrew Gospel as the source of the synoptics. G. E. Lessing, “Neue Hypothese über die Evangelisten als bloß menschliche Geschichtschreiber betrachtet,” in *Sämmtliche Schriften*, vol. 6 (Berlin, 1825), 225–257.

⁴¹ Edwards, op. cit. 259.

Moreover, the narrative would absorb some of the earliest written gospel material, i.e. the *Sayings of the Lord* which were put down by the shlichim after the resurrection and compiled by Mattai after the ascension (sadly mislabeled as the *Gospel of Thomas*).

The Hebrew Gospel was written some ten years before Toma (“Thomas”) left for India where he started converting Jews around Cochin.⁴² Thaddeus, one of the seventy-two disciples, took a Syriac copy to Edessa – it was the *one* Gospel mentioned in the *Doctrine of Addai*.

Until Nicea, the Gospel According to the Hebrews possessed *de facto* hermeneutical authority and was frequently cited with the prefix “it is written.”⁴³ After Nicea, it was mislabelled ‘Diatessaron’ and hence increasingly vilified till it was seized and binned with little resistance (‘to protect the public from its heretical influence’).

Interestingly enough, in 373 CE, prior to the Tatianic cleansing, Epiphanius relates to Yeshua’s immersion and pictures what ensued when he ascended from the water; he quotes from the Hebrew Gospel:

And straightaway a great light shone.⁴⁴

The phenomenon is affirmed by Syrian bishop Ishodad four hundred years later; yet he links the quote to the Diatessaron:

And straightaway a great light shone.⁴⁵

The light incident, mentioned by Justin, Cyprian and preserved by a couple of Itala MSS, is naturally absent from *Codex Fuldensis*. It is also absent from the Old Syriac MSS which, as we are told, formed the basis of Ephrem’s commentary.⁴⁶ Needless to say,

⁴² Thomas landed in Cranganore in 52 CE. He would have taken along the Hebrew Gospel which needed copying and translation since the Indian natives **did not understand his words, as he was a Hebrew and his words were spoken in Hebrew** (*Acts of Thomas* 8). The Syriac-speaking Assyrian Church traces its origins to Thomas, Mari, and Addai. For an overview, see S. Missick, “Mar Thoma,” JAAS 14 (2000): 57.

⁴³ For instance, by Clement, *Strom.* 2.9 and Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 15:14. “Nowadays [325 CE] some have reckoned among [the disputed books] the Gospel according to the Hebrews” (*Ecccl. hist.* 3.25).

⁴⁴ *Pan.* 30.13.7.

⁴⁵ M. Gibson, *The Commentaries of Isho’dad of Merv*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1911), 27.

⁴⁶ Unless he used Itala MSS – which seems unlikely –, Ephrem’s mention of the light is rather due to his acquaintance with the Hebrew Gospel (since the Old Syriac omits the light; *Comm. Diat.* 4.5); and since he states that Luke began with John’s baptism, he could have scarcely quoted Lk 1–2.

it is absent from all other ‘Diatessaronic witnesses.’⁴⁷ The Arabic version, produced five hundred years after Victor’s contribution, draws chiefly from the Peshitta which is based on the Byzantine text. Five hundred years is plenty of time to arrange the MSS accordingly, but sadly, as in Victor’s case, the precious Syriac MS got lost. No light can be found in the German, Dutch, Italian, and Persian harmonies either.⁴⁸

Evidently, the aforementioned agreement of quotations is due to the fact that they stemmed from the same work. Ishodad wrote half a millennium after the name change project when the Syrians were strongly encouraged to bow to the belief that the *Evangeliōn da-Mehalletē* was a blasphemous text. With Rome, however, it’s always the other way round.

The *Gospel According to the Hebrews* did not include falsified nativities nor conflicting genealogies but excelled what we have in our mainstream gospels without anti-Judaic, antinomian, and idolatrous Trinitarian alterations,⁴⁹ nor with repetitions or doublets: from the immense light hovering above the Jordan via the ‘Pericope Adulterae’ to the woes at Golgotha – a ‘mix’ (if viewed with canonical glasses) with input from all the apostles and their followers. It was the only gospel the Messiah’s followers ever knew:

The Nazarenes only accept the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*.⁵⁰

We may take solace in the fact that while the Nicene propaganda was in full swing, there was still a Nazarene remnant who knew very well what text it was:

⁴⁷ The Papyrus Gospel records a “brightness of heaven” at the baptism, its structure, however, has no connection with the framework of the Latin or Arabic version.

⁴⁸ Metzger finds many ‘Tatianic readings’ in the Persian harmony, such as “Joseph, because he was a just man” which omits “her husband” and thus betrays Encratite leanings; he even supports it with Ephrem while omitting the latter’s citation of “Mary your spouse” (Mt 1:20). Shem Tov must have been an Encratite too since he also omits the husband in Mt 1:19. And the writers of the Old Syriac MSS were also Encratites – they were all heretics. For further ascetical Tatianic readings (and a good laugh) see B. Metzger, “Tatian’s Diatessaron and a Persian Harmony of the Gospels,” *JBL* 69 (1950): 261–80.

⁴⁹ In 336 CE, Aphrahat cited “Go and instruct all Gentiles and they will believe on me” (*Dem.* 1.8); that was four years before the Trinitarian formula was included in **ŋ**. The Hebrew Gospel knew nothing of an idolatrous Trinity, see also [J. Wilson, *The Anti-Semitic Forgery of Matthew 28:19* \(Academia, 2020\)](#).

⁵⁰ Theodoret, *Haer. Fab. Comp.* 2.1–2.

The Diatessaron Ruse – How the Hebrew Gospel Was Erased

The Diatessaron Gospel is said to have been made by him [Tatian], which some call the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*.⁵¹

Epiphanius, viewed as a ‘saint’ by P. Hill,⁵² prefixes the above statement by noting that Tatian, the former disciple of Justin Martyr, had fallen into an evil way of thinking and that the Encratites had gotten their share of his poison. Tatian who had been dead for two hundred years is branded a blasphemer, a deceiver, and a ravening wolf who taught falsehood, nonsense, and foolishness, besides being called stupid, blind, and compared to a mosquito.

We may remind the reader that according to Ishodad, the Messiah’s father was an Encratite too (after all he was a *tzaddik*).⁵³ Put another way, Yosef was also a heretical cult member who had been poisoned, and that 170 years before Tatian had founded the sect. Isn’t that amazing? The author would love to see some shite published on this via Brill, Oxford, or Cambridge (but sadly, like Tatian, Metzger is dead).

While his fictive compound gospel was already under censure in Eusebius’ day, it seems the indiscriminating antagonism was needed for the final solution, i.e. for the erasure of the Jewish Gospel on the pretext of removing heresy. James Rendel Harris astutely observes:

It is not easy to see why a simple harmony of the Gospels should provoke hostility, even if an occasional apocryphal sentence be found therein. There is hardly any period in the history of the Church when someone has not been combining or harmonising the narratives of the four Gospels: nor would the Church normally visit such efforts with censure.⁵⁴

The Gospel at issue had to be stamped out *not* because it was a harmony (which it wasn’t), nor because it was encratic (which it wasn’t), nor because it was penned by a heretic (which it wasn’t), but because it was Jewish and its contents were diametrically opposed to the Hellenic counterfeit.

⁵¹ *Pan.* 46.1. The Encratites are “an offshoot of Tatian” (*Pan.* 47.1). While Petersen spends two pages to nullify Epiphanius’ testimony, op. cit. 39–41, Edwards passes over it in silence, op. cit. 23.

⁵² Peter Hill, “The Diatessaron,” *OFL* 1 (2019): 31.

⁵³ Gibson, op. cit. 157.

⁵⁴ Harris, op. cit. 11.

4. CONCLUSION

In the late second century, the proto-Catholic Church prepared four gospels: the synoptics (extracted from the Hebrew Gospel) and a polished version of ‘John.’ Besides adding nativities and genealogies, they featured insertions, omissions, and alterations – these texts were sanitized for a Gentile audience.

The detached Syrian Church, which occupied territories stretching as far as Parthia, largely escaped the influence of MS tampering which continued unabated in the West; the East was lagging behind and by the mid-fourth century it was time to deal with the unadulterated Hebrew Gospel.

Whether Tatian was encratic or not is irrelevant; he was charged with it. As a well-educated Syrian who had the potential to conflate the gospels, Tatian became the ideal scapegoat when he eventually faded into oblivion. His destroyed reputation linked to an alleged authorship supplied a perfect pretext for destroying the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*.

Ignoring encratic apparitions, we readily see that the more tangible features cited above from Theodoret’s *Compendium of Heretical Accounts* and the *Doctrine of Addai* don’t belong to the ‘Diatessaronic witnesses’ but to the Hebrew Gospel:

	Diatessaron	Hebrew Gospel
<i>Lacks genealogies</i>	✘	✔
<i>Lacks passages showing Yeshua’s Davidic descent</i>	✘	✔
<i>Reports a light at Yeshua’s baptism</i>	✘	✔
<i>Extant in first-century Syria</i>	✘	✔

Table 1: Pseudo-Diatessaronic features which belong to the Hebrew Gospel

The Nazarenes knew that Yeshua was the *Son of David*, i.e. the Messiah, and while their Gospel included the nativity, it wasn’t interpolated to stress Davidic descent.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Only the Ebionites rejected Yeshua’s divine birth; their Gospel omits the nativity (*Pan.* 30.13.6).

With regard to the fabricated Diatessaron, we may sum up this table by saying that there are structural witnesses which don't preserve the original structure, and textual witnesses which don't preserve the original text. Or, a bit shorter: the 'Diatessaronic witnesses' are false witnesses.

The Old Syriac, the Old Latin, Marcion's *Evangelion*, the 'Memoirs of the Apostles,' and the 'Clementine Recognitions & Homilies' have preserved a few readings of the Hebrew text, a text that enjoyed an elevated position in Syria until its final suppression in the mid-fifth century.

While Rome is known for subterfuge, the Western academia (largely unregenerate) is evidently unable or unwilling to perceive such lucid mechanisms as the above. We can therefore expect to see more ink wasted on inane 'Diatessaron research,' perfectly exemplifying the academia's expertise in piling fallacies upon false premises.

Yet we wouldn't expect any different from Gentile post-Enlightenment 'scholars,' would we. The bulk is so degenerate that they will only acknowledge their spirit once it has left their body. We trust that the smiling, esteemed dummies and Romish pawns will then know that they should have rescued their souls rather than their reputation; the fire pit is undoubtedly an appropriate destination for them.

In closing: our harmony about the weed and the sheep may well be prescient: Prior to a prolonged stay in גי הנום (*gei hinnom*), both the patrons of false wheat and the ones who heedlessly feed on it will be incinerated at the Parousia. Yet, this is for another time and not our present concern.

