

Some Important Documents for the History And Doctrines of Ebionite Christianity

KP and AJ passages are taken from The Clementina, in Vol. 8 of the Ante-Nicene Fathers (Eerdmans, 1981 reprint). Compiled by Christopher Buck and word-processed by Carol Lenhard, December 1982, Bellingham, WA.

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The Record of Epiphanius ("The Patriarch of Orthodoxy"):

□ Account of the Ebionites (Panarion 30)

"Their origin goes back to the time after the capture of Jerusalem. For after all those who believed in Christ had generally come to live in Perea (Trans Jordan), in a city called Pella... For some of them say that Christ is also Adam... But others among them say that He is from above and was created before all things.. He comes into the world when He wishes for He came into Adam and appeared to the patriarchs... .and who at the end of times appeared to men, was crucified, raised and returned on high. Next, as they wish, they say: this is not true but the Spirit who is Christ came upon him and took the boy of him who is called Jesus... But they also accept the Gospel according to Matthew... They call it 'according to the Hebrews' which name is correct since Matthew is the only one in the New Testament who issued the Gospel and the proclamation in Hebrew and with Hebrew letters..."

"And after much is said in the Gospel it continues: 'After the people has been baptized Jesus also came and was baptized by John... And a voice from heaven said: "... This day I have generated thee.'"

"They also use some other books, the so-called Periodoi of Peter which were written by Clement but they corrupted the contents.. In the Periodoi.. .Peter.. .washes himself every day to sanctify himself... They also say that he abstains from animals and meat... They apparently also have.. the eucharist... with unleavened bread and... water only as their Gospel... shows: (Jesus said:) "I have come to abolish sacrifices and if you do not stop sacrificing the wrath will not cease from you."

"They also mention other Acts of the Apostles.. In the Anabathmoi of James they accept some steps and stories for example that he preaches against the temple and the sacrifices... Christ they call the Prophet of truth.. But they also do not accept the entire Pentateuch of Moses; some passages they reject... Christ... blasphemes most of the legislation..." (from Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden: Brill, 1973) pp.177-189).

Fragments from a lost Ebionite-Christian Scripture:

The Proclamation of Peter (The Kerygmata Petrou)

"A Cry... from Their Inmost Hearts": Man's Need for God

"The will and counsel of God have for many reasons been concealed from men; ...evils have filled... this world, like some enormous smoke, and preventing those who dwell in it from seeing its Founder aright... What, then, is fitting for those who are within, excepting with a cry brought forth from their inmost hearts to invoke His aid, ...so that the smoke may be dissipated which is within, and the light of the sun.. .may be admitted" (R 1:15).

The Unknowability of God

And Peter said: "...For the Scriptures lie before each one like many divers types. Each one, then, has his own disposition like wax, and examining the Scriptures... moulds his idea of God according to his wish, laying upon them... his own disposition, which is like wax" (H 16:10).

Be it so: you cannot know what God is, but you can very easily know what God is not" (R 6:6). "Not only so; but God cannot be good or evil, just or unjust. Nor indeed can He have intelligence, or life, or any of the other attributes which can exist in man; for all these are peculiar to man. And if we must not, in our investigations in regard to God, give Him the good attributes which belong to man, it is not possible for us to have any thought or make any statement in regard to God; but all we can do is to investigate one point alone, -- namely, what is His will which He has Himself allowed us to apprehend" (H 19:10).

The True Prophet: "Who alone can enlighten the souls of men"

He, therefore, whose aid is needed for the house filled with the darkness of ignorance and the smoke of vices, is He, we say, who is called the true Prophet, who alone can enlighten

the souls of men, so that with their eyes they may plainly see the way of safety. For otherwise it is impossible to get knowledge of divine and eternal things, unless one learns of that true Prophet" (R 1:16).

Now the Prophet of the truth is He who always knows all things -- things past as they were, things present as they are, things future as they shall be; sinless, merciful, alone entrusted with the declaration of the truth... For this is peculiar to the Prophet, to declare the truth, even as it is peculiar to the sun to bring the day" (H 2:6).

"The Prophet of Truth, being One" (H 2:15 prior to KP)

"A Succession of Prophets" (H 2:15 prior to KP)

"Who were the Seven Pillars of the World. (H 18:14 after KP)

"But give heed to my first discourse of the truth: ...the Holy Spirit of Christ... alone has it, who has changed his forms and his names from the beginning of the world, and so reappeared again and again in the world, until coming upon his own times, and being anointed with mercy for the works of God, shall enjoy rest forever" (H 3:2).

"The Prophet of Truth is the Christ"

"Know then that Christ, who was from the beginning, and always, was ever present with the pious, though secretly, ...to whom He frequently appeared" (R 52). "But he is called Christ by a certain excellent rite of religion; for as there are certain names common to kings, as Arsaces among the Persians, Caesar among the Romans, Pharaoh among the Egyptians, so among the Jews a king is called Christ. And the reason of this appellation is this:

"Although indeed He was the Son of God, and the beginning of all things, He became Man (Adam); Him first God anointed with oil which was taken from the wood of the Tree of Life: from that anointing therefore He is called Christ" (R 1:45).

"Adam Anointed the First Prophet of Truth"

Then Peter, smiling, said: "If the first man prophesied, it is certain that he was also anointed. For although he who has recorded the law in his pages is silent as to his anointing, yet... it would not be doubted that he was also a prophet, although it were not written in the law" (R 1:47).

"Our father was ignorant of nothing; since, indeed, even the law publicly current, though charging him with the crime of ignorance for the sake of the unworthy, sends to him those desirous of knowledge, saying, 'Ask your father (Adam), and he will tell you'" (H :18, citing Deut 32:7).

"Neither was Adam a Transgressor"

"He himself being the only true prophet, fittingly gave names to each animal, according to the merits of its nature, as having made it. For if he gave a name to anyone, that was also the name of that which was made, being given by him who made it (Gen 2:20). How, then, had he still need to partake of a tree, that he might know what is good and what is evil, if he was commanded not to eat of it? But this senseless men believe, who think that a reasonless beast was more powerful than the God who made all these things" (H 3:21).

Then Peter answered: "Assuredly, with good reason, I neither believe anything against God, nor against the just men recorded in the law, taking for granted they are impious imaginations. For, as I am persuaded, neither was Adam a transgressor, who was fashioned by the hands of God; nor was Noah drunken, who was found righteous above all the world (Gen 7:1): nor did Abraham live with three wives at once, who, on account of his sobriety, was thought worthy of a numerous posterity; nor did Jacob associate with four--of whom two were sisters--who was the father of the twelve tribes, and who intimated the coming of the presence of our Master; nor was Moses a murderer, nor did he learn to judge from an idolatrous priest--he who set forth the law of God to all the world" (H 2:52).

"And I do not think he will obtain pardon, though he be misled by spurious scripture to think dreadful things against the Father of all. For he... insults the image... belonging to the eternal King... But then, he says, the Divine Spirit left him when he sinned. In that case the Spirit sinned along with him; and how can he escape peril who says this? But perhaps he received the Spirit after he sinned. Then it is given to the unrighteous; and where is justice?" (H 3:17).

"The Signs of a True Prophet"

"But he who amongst the sons of men had prophecy innate to his soul as belonging to it, expressly.. .says that we must pray to one only God... He hates sacrifices, bloodshed, and libations: he loves the chaste, the pure, the holy. He quenches the fire of altars, represses wars, teaches pious preachers wisdom, purges sins, sanctions marriage, approves temperance, leads all to chastity, makes men liberal, prescribes justice, seals those of them who are perfect, publishes the word of peace, prophesies explicitly, speaks decidedly, frequently makes mention of the eternal fire of punishment, constantly announces the

kingdom of God, indicates heavenly riches, promises unfading glory, shows the remission of sins by works" (H 3:26).

"The True Prophet is the Gate of Life"

"Wherefore He, being the true Prophet, said, "I am the gate of life; he who entereth through me entereth into life," (John 10:9) there being no other teaching able to save" (H 3:52). "...the key of the kingdom... is knowledge, which alone can open the gate of life, through which alone is the entrance to eternal life" (H 3:18).

"Definition of "The Way"

"Understand, therefore, that the way is this course of our life; the travellers are those who do goods works; the gate is the true Prophet...; the city is the kingdom in which dwells the Almighty Father, whom only those can see who are of pure heart. Let us not think the labour of this journey too hard, because at the end of it there shall be rest. For the true Prophet Himself also from the beginning of the world, through the course of time, hastens to rest" (R 2:22).

"The Doctrine and Proclamation of Christ"

"And this is His doctrine and true proclamation, that there is one God whose work the world is, who being altogether righteous, shall certainly at some time render to everyone according to his deeds" (H 2:21). "Wherefore the first duty of all is to inquire into the righteousness of God and His kingdom (Matt 6:33); His kingdom, that we may know what is the reward appointed for labour and patience... His righteousness, that we may be taught to act rightly; ...For the time is short, and the judgment of God shall be occupied with deeds, not questions" (R 2:20).

"Salvation"

"Salvation is this, that you do His will of whom you have conceived a love and affection through the gift of God; lest that saying of His be addressed to you which He spoke, 'Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?'" (R 4:5, citing Luke 6:45). "For we say that he is a worshipper of God, who does the will of God, and observes the precepts of His law... But he who seems to worship God, but is neither fortified by a full faith, nor by obedience to the commandments... is a sinner" (R 5:34).

"God, ...through His love... brings the soul to Himself by reason of His love towards it. And although it be sinful, it is His nature to save it, after it has been suitably punished for

the deeds it hath done" (H 3:6). "Now it is within the power of every righteous man to repent and be saved; and every righteous man may have to undergo punishment for sins committed at the end of his career" (H 20:3).

"A man ought to punish himself through self-restraint" (H 19:19). "Therefore approach, be ye righteous or unrighteous. For if you are righteous, baptism alone is lacking in order to salvation. But if you are unrighteous, come to be baptized for the remission of the sins formerly committed in ignorance. And to the unrighteous man it remains that his well-doing after baptism be according to the proportion of his previous impiety. Wherefore, ...hasten to be born to God... And the will of the righteous One is that you do no wrong (H 11:27). "Therefore the love of men towards God is sufficient for salvation" (H 3:8).

Salvation of Jews and Christians

"For on this account Jesus is concealed from the Jews, who have taken Moses as their teacher, and Moses is hidden from those who have believed in Jesus. For, there being one teaching by both, God accepts him who has believed either of these" (H 8:6). "For even the Hebrews who believe Moses, and do not observe the things spoken by him, are not saved, unless they observe the things that are spoken to them... Neither is there salvation in believing in teachers and calling them lords" (H 8:5).

"Neither, therefore, are the Hebrews condemned by account of their ignorance of Jesus, by reason of Him who has concealed Him, if, doing the things commanded by Moses they do not hate Him (Jesus) whom they do know. Neither are those from among the Gentiles condemned, who do not know Moses, provided that these also, doing the things spoken by Jesus, do not hate Him (Moses) whom they do not know" (H 8: 7) .

"And some will not be profited by calling the teachers lords, but not doing the works of servants... Moreover, if anyone has been thought worthy to recognize both as preaching one doctrine, that man has been counted rich in God, understanding the old things as new in time, and the new things as old" (H 8:7).

The Origination of Sin

When Peter said this, Micah, who was himself one of his followers, asked, "What, then is the reason why men sin?" And Peter said: "It is because they are ignorant... For this reason they, having lust... for the continuance of life, gratify it in any accidental way,... Wherefore God is not evil, who has rightly placed lust within man, that there may be a continuance of life, but they are most impious who have used the good of lust badly" (H 20:4). "For ignorance will be found to be the mother of almost all evils." (R 4:8) "For we ought to have

something more than the animals, as reasonable men, and capable of heavenly senses, whose chief study it ought to be to guard the conscience from every defilement of the heart" (R 6:10).

• **"Evil... cannot exist at all substantially"**

And Peter said: "Evil, then, does not exist always, yea, it cannot even exist at all substantially; for pain and death belong to the class of accidents, neither of which can coexist with abiding strength. For what is pain but the interruption of harmony? And what is death but the separation of soul from body? There is therefore no pain when there is harmony. For death does not even at all belong to those things which substantially exist: for death is nothing, as I said, but the separation of soul from body; and when this takes place, the body, which is by nature incapable of sensation, is dissolved; but the soul, being capable of sensation, remains in life and exists substantially. Hence where there is harmony there is no pain, no death, no, not even deadly plants nor poisonous reptiles, nor anything of such a nature that its end is death" (H 19:20).

• **Blood Sacrifice does not absolve Sin**

"He (God) is not pleased with sacrifices, ...did not ordain sacrifices as desiring them; nor from the beginning did he require them" (H 3:45; cf. Jer 7:22, Amos 5:25 and parallels.)

• **Falsehoods in the Scriptures**

"For the Scriptures have had joined to them many falsehoods against God on this account. The prophet Moses having by the order of God delivered the law, with the explanations, to certain chosen men, same seventy in number, in order that they also might instruct such of the people as they chose; after a little time the written law had added to it certain falsehoods contrary to the law of God" (H 2:38). "For we do not wish to say in public that these chapters are added to the Bible, since we should thereby perplex the unlearned multitudes" (H 2:39).

• **How Corruption of the Scriptures came to pass**

Then said Peter: "The law of God was given by Moses, without writing, to seventy wise men, to be handed down, that the government might be carried on by succession. But after that Moses was taken up, it was written by some one, but not Moses. For in the law itself it is written, 'And Moses died; and no one knows his sepulchre till this day.' But how could Moses write that Moses died? And whereas in the time after Moses, about 500 years or thereabouts, it is found lying in the temple which was built, and after about 500 years

more it is carried away, and being burnt in the time of Nebuchadnezzar it is destroyed; and thus being written after Moses, and often lost, even this shows the foreknowledge of Moses, because he, foreseeing its disappearance, did not write it; but those who wrote it, being convicted of ignorance through their not foreseeing its disappearance, were not prophets" (H 3:47).

Then Peter said: "If, therefore, some of the Scriptures are true and some false, with good reason said our Master, 'Be ye good money-changers,' inasmuch as in the Scriptures there are some true sayings and some spurious. And to those who err by reason of the false scriptures He fitly showed the cause of their error, saying, 'Ye do therefore err, not knowing the true things of the Scriptures; for this reason ye are ignorant also of the power of God'" (H 2:51; cf. Matt 22:29, Mark 12:24).

How to Discern the True from the False Scriptures

Then Peter said: "Whatever sayings of the Scriptures are in harmony with the creation that was made by Him are true, but whatever are contrary to it are false" (H 3:42). "And also that He (Jesus) said, 'I am not come to destroy the law' (Matt 5:17) and yet He appeared to be destroying it, as the part of one intimating that the things which He destroyed did not belong to the law. And His saying, 'The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but one jot or tittle shall not pass from the law,' intimated that the things which pass away before the heaven and the earth do not belong to the law in reality" (H 3:51). "Obeying Christ, we learn to know what is false from the Scriptures" (H 16:14).

Peter, the Expounder of Christ's Sayings

Then says Peter: "...For we apostles are sent to expound the sayings and affirm the judgments of Him who has sent us; but we are not commissioned to say anything of our own, but to unfold the truth... of His words" (R 2:34).

The Apostles as Angels or Messengers to Gentiles

"Knowing therefore that we knew all that was spoken by Him, and that we could supply the proofs, He sent us to the ignorant Gentiles to baptize them for the remission of sins and commanded us to teach them first (cf. Acts 15:7 vs. Gal 2:7). Of His commandments this is the first and great one, to fear the Lord God, and to serve Him only. But He meant us to fear that God whose angels they are who are the angels of the least of the faithful amongst us, and who stand in heaven continually beholding the face of the Father" (H 17:7).

The True Apostles are The Twelve

And Peter said: "We remember that our Lord and Teacher, commanding us, said, 'Keep the mysteries for me and the sons of my house.' Wherefore also He explained to His disciples privately the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (H 19:20; cf. Mark 4:34, Matt 13:11). "But let neither prophet nor apostle be looked for by you at this time, besides us. For there is one true Prophet, whose words we twelve apostles preach; for He is the accepted year of God, having us apostles as His twelve months" (R 4:35).

"Our Lord and Prophet, who hath sent us, declared to us that the wicked one, having disputed with Him forty days,... promised that he would send apostles from amongst his subjects, to deceive. Wherefore, above all, remember to shun apostle or teacher who does not first accurately compare his preaching with that of James, who was called the brother of my Lord, and to whom was entrusted to administer the church of the Hebrews in Jerusalem" (H 11: 35) .

The Polemic against Paul

"If, then our Jesus appeared to you in a vision, made Himself known to you, and spoke to you, it was as one who is enraged with an adversary; and this is the reason why it was through visions and dreams, or through revelations that were from without, that He spoke to you. But can anyone be rendered fit for instruction through apparitions? And if you will say, 'It is possible' then I ask, 'Why did our teacher abide and discourse a whole year to those who were awake?' And how are we to believe your word, when you tell us that He appeared to you? And how did He appear to you, when you entertain opinions contrary to His teachings? But if you were seen and taught by Him, and became His apostle for a single hour, proclaim His utterances, interpret His sayings, love His apostles, contend not with me who accompanied with Him. For in direct opposition to me, who am a firm rock, the foundation of the Church, you now stand. If you were not opposed to me, you would not accuse me, and revile the truth proclaimed by me, in order that I may not be believed when I state what I myself have heard with my own ears from the Lord, as if I were evidently a person that was condemned (cf. Gal 2:11) and in bad repute. But if you say that I am condemned, you bring an accusation against God, who revealed the Christ to me, and you inveigh against Him who pronounced me blessed on account of the revelation. But if, indeed, you really wish to work in the cause of truth, learn first of all from us what we have learned from Him, and, becoming a disciple of the truth, become a fellow-worker with us" (H 17:19).

Was Christ God Incarnate?

And Peter answered: "Our Lord neither asserted that there were gods except the Creator of

all, nor did He proclaim Himself to be God, but He with reason pronounced blessed him who called Him the Son of that God who has arranged the universe." And Simon answered: "Does it not seem to you, then, that he who comes from God is God?" And Peter said: "Tell us how this is possible; for we cannot affirm this, because we did not hear it from Him" (H 16:15).

Is Christ of the same Substance of God?

"In addition to this, it is the peculiarity of the Father not to have been begotten, but of the Son to have been begotten; but what is begotten cannot be compared with that which is unbegotten or self-begotten." And Simon said: "Is it not the same on account of its origin?" And Peter said: "He who is not the same in all respects as some one, cannot have all the same appellations applied to Him as that person." And Simon said: "This is to assert, not to prove." And Peter said: "Why, do you not see that if the one happens to be self-begotten or unbegotten, they cannot be called the same; nor can it be asserted of him who has been begotten that he is of the same substance as he is who has begotten him? ...Learn this also: The bodies of men have immortal souls, which have been clothed with the breath of God; and having come forth from God, they are of the same substance, but they are not gods." (H 16:16).

Can Christ be called God?

"Listen, then," says Peter, "that you may know, first of all, that even if there are many gods, as you say, they are subject to the God of the Jews, to whom no one is equal... For not every one that is called God is necessarily God. Indeed, even Moses is called a god to Pharaoh (Exod 7: 1) ...But Christ is God of Princes" (R 2:41,42).

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Faith in the Third Millennium

FOOTNOTES

1. Compare the status of St. Peter in Matthew 16:17-19 and Acts 15:7 with the claims of Paul in Romans 11:13 and 2 Cor 11:5.
2. Pauls only quote from the words of Jesus is found in 1 Cor 11:23-25. He also refers to the sayings of Jesus in three places, namely: 1 Cor. 7:10, 9:14, and 1 Thess. 4:15.
3. cf. PAUL, H.J. Schoeps, pg 57 - "The fact is that Paul preaches only faith in Jesus, not the faith of Jesus."
4. Mark 12:29
5. Jesus was a Prophet: Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24
6. This is stated expressly in John 14:28 - "...the Father is greater than I", and implicitly in Matthew 19:17, Mark 13:32 etc.
7. The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Gibbon, II, pg 812
8. John 4:24 - "God is a Spirit..."
9. The idea of God's incarnation has been defended by citing the virgin birth; Isn't God the physical father of Jesus? But this approach opens the proverbial Pandora's box. For example, many passages indicate that one proof of Jesus as Messiah is that He was descended from David's line through His father, Joseph (Luke 3:23-38, 4:22; John 1:45, 6:42). The greatness of Jesus Christ consists in His spiritual perfections and gifts which were born of God, not from the fact of a virgin birth. If His greatness depended on having no physical father, then the Jewish expectation of a Messiah descended from David remains unfulfilled, and we should give greater worship to Adam, the eldest "Son of God" (Luke 3:38) or Melchizedek (Heb.7:3) inasmuch as both were born without either father or mother.
10. John 17:10 - "...all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine..."
11. Matthew 12:31, 32
12. John 12:49,50 - "...I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandant, what to say, and what to speak... I speak just as the Father has told Me." John 14:24 - "...the Word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's Who sent Me."
13. John 14:11
14. John 12:45 - "...he who beholds Me beholds the One Who sent Me." John 14:7,9 - "...he who has seen Me has seen the Father." etc.
15. Genesis 9:6
16. "The Christian concept of the Devil is a composite drawn from many disparate sources - most of them ideas and legends that originated outside the accepted Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Satan is primarily a Judaized version of Ahriman, whom ancient Persians [esp. Zoroastrians]

regarded as the Prince of Darkness, the Father of lies and the source of human suffering and death - the equal but opposite, of Ohrmazd, the God of order and light... [Iranian dualism became a strong influence on the apocryphal works such as the book of Enoch. In essence these books reinterpreted scattered Old Testament verses and stories in order to fashion a Devil in the image and likeness of Ahriman... Many rabbis refused to accept the myth or the books in which it was told. Indeed, after the destruction of the Temple... the Devil has no standing in Judaism... But the Devil that Judaism rejected Christianity embraced.]" *Giving the Devil His Due*, Newsweek, Aug 30, 1982.

17. 1 John 1:5
18. John 8:32 - "...and you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free."
19. Matthew 5:48
20. John 6:68, 8:51

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