

# A Fourteenth Century Text in which Jesus Taught the Kingdom of God During the Night at Bethany: Does It Demonstrate That Secret Mark Is an Ancient Text, and Not a Modern Forgery?

This essay was co-authored by  
David Blocker and Roger Viklund

---

## Abstract

The 14th century polemical treatise *Even Bohan* written by Shem-Tob ben Shaprut contains a Hebrew version of the complete text of the *Gospel of Matthew*. In this text, Jesus is said to have spent the night in Bethany where he taught the disciples about the Kingdom of God. The *Secret Gospel of Mark* contains a similar passage. If the two texts can be shown to be interrelated it would provide strong evidence that the *Secret Gospel of Mark* is not a modern forgery.

The Secret Gospel of Mark also demonstrates that the redactional history of the Jesus tradition is complex.

## The History of the Texts

The *Even Bohan* is an anti Christian treatise written by the Spanish Jewish philosopher Shem-Tob ben Isaac Shaprut of Tudela. It was initially composed between 1380 and 1385 CE. Shem-Tob issued several revisions of the *Even Bohan*, adding five more books to his original twelve. The twelfth book includes a complete Hebrew text of the *Gospel of Matthew*, which is interspersed with anti-Christian commentary.

George Howard extracted the text of *Matthew* from the *Even Bohan*, translated it into English and published it in 1987 (George Howard, *The Gospel of Matthew according to a Primitive Hebrew Text*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987). A second revised edition was published in 1995 (George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995).

George Howard wrote:

“In my judgment, Shem-Tob the polemist did not prepare this text by translating it from Latin Vulgate, the Byzantine Greek, or any other known edition of the Gospel of Matthew. He received it from previous generations of Jewish scribes and tradents.” (George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Preface to the Second Edition)

Howard also wrote:

“Shem-Tob’s Hebrew Matthew is the most unusual text of the First Gospel extant. It contains a plethora of readings which are not to be found in any of the Christian codices of the Greek Gospel. Its unusual nature may be explained by the fact that it underwent a different process of transmission than the Greek, since it was preserved by Jews, independent from the Christian community. A textual profile of Shem-Tob’s Matthew reveals that it sporadically agrees with early witnesses, both Christian and non-Christian. Sometimes it agrees with readings and documents that vanished in antiquity only to reappear in recent times. The profile thus suggests that a Shem-Tob type text of Matthew was known in the early Christian centuries.” (George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, p. 190–191)

This *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* should not be confused with the so-called *Gospel of the Hebrews* (i). The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* is a version of the *Gospel of Matthew*, and George Howard argues convincingly for its antiquity (ii).

The *Secret Gospel of Mark* is a text referred to in a letter attributed to Clement of Alexandria, a late second and early third century Christian scholar. Two excerpts from the *Secret Gospel of Mark* are quoted in the letter. A copy of the letter was discovered by Morton Smith in 1958, when he was cataloguing texts at the Mar Saba Monastery in Israel (iii).

### **Dissimilar texts of Matthew 21:17**

There is a subtle but noteworthy difference between the Greek and the Hebrew versions of *Matthew* 21:17.

In the Greek text of *Matthew* 21:12–18, Jesus drove out all who were buying and selling from the temple courts. Then, after he cured the lame and the blind, Jesus went to Bethany:

“21:17 And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night. 18 Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry.”

In this account, Jesus spend the night in Bethany, and no other significant events were reported as having occurred there (iv).

Shem-Tob’s *Hebrew Matthew* (21:17) contains additional information about what Jesus did when he spent the night in Bethany. George Howard’s translation is as follows:

“He left and went out to Bethany and (spent the night) there **and there he was explaining to them the Kingdom of God.**” (George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, p. 103, our emphasis)

Compare this to the long excerpt from the *Secret Gospel of Mark* in Morton Smith’s translation:

“**And they come into Bethany.** And a certain woman whose brother had died was there. And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.' But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And going near, Jesus rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And straightaway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb, they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus told him what to do, and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. **And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God.** And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan.” (our emphasis)

The *Shem-Tob Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, contains a verse (*Shem-Tob Matthew* 21:17) which has a direct counterpart in the *Secret Gospel of Mark*. Moreover, there is no

corresponding overlap between *Canonical Matthew* and the *Secret Gospel of Mark*. The verse in *Hebrew Matthew* contains the first and last sentence of the paragraph from *Secret Mark* that Clement of Alexandria recorded in his *Letter to Theodore* (the phrases about Jesus' interaction with the "certain woman" and Lazarus are excluded).

The Hebrew text of *Matthew* is preserved in nine manuscripts which date between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries (v). Verse 21:17 is transcribed by Howard as

ויעזוב וילך חוצה אל בית חנניא וילך שם ושם היה דורש להם  
ממלכות האל.

Or...

ויעזוב וילך חוצה אל בית חנניא וילך שם ושם היה דורש להם ממלכות האל.

Howard translates this as:

"He left and went out to Bethany and (spent the night) there and there he was explaining to them the Kingdom of God."

Since neither of us knows Hebrew, we asked for a second opinion from Professor Stephen L. Cook (vi), who replied:

"As it stands, the text appears to say "So he left, and he went out to the house of Hannaniah and he went there and there he was seeking for them the kingdom of God."

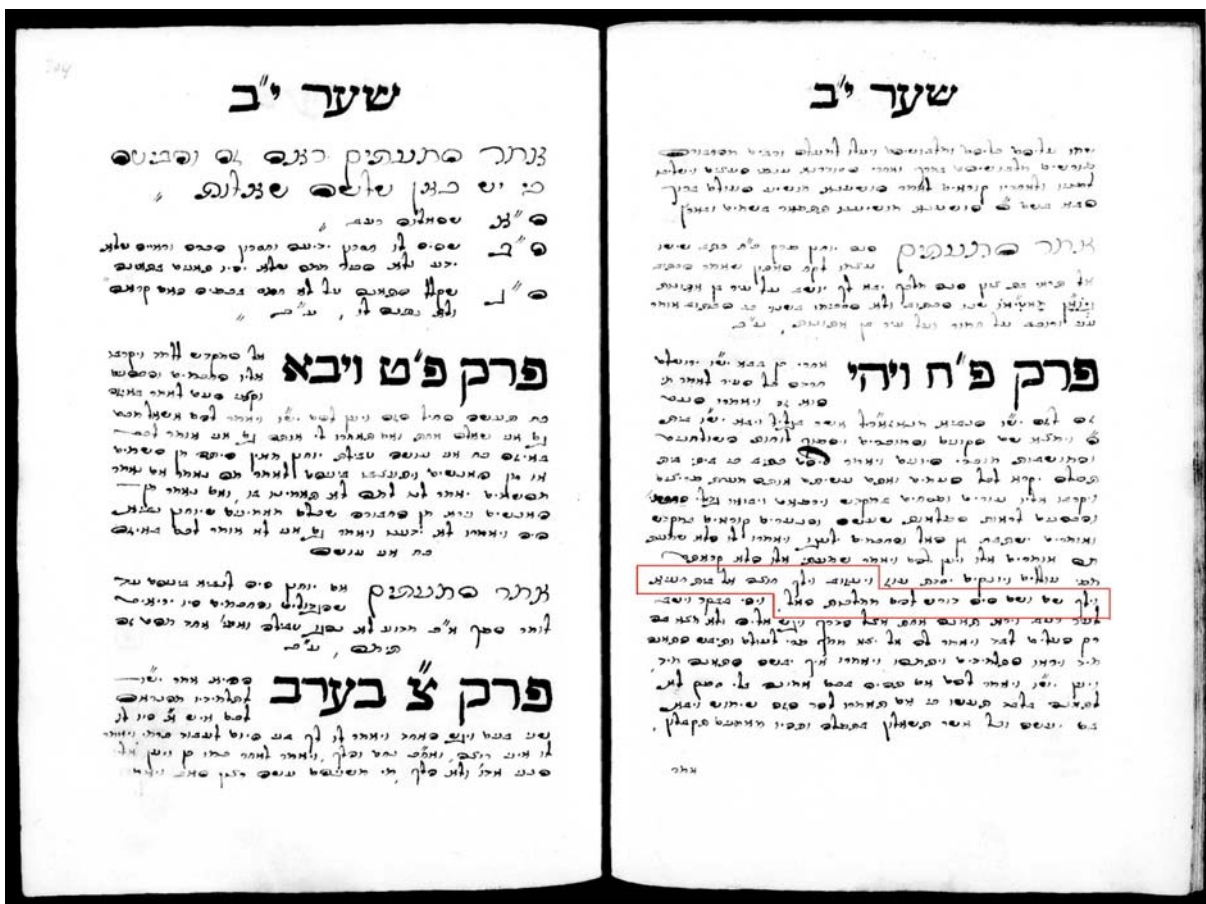
The house of Hannaniah is of course Bethany (Beit Hannaniah). However, there are two noteworthy deviations from Howard's translation. In Cook's translation, Jesus was "seeking for them" the Kingdom of God, while Howard translates the same passage as Jesus was "explaining" it to them.

Nevertheless, both translations imply that some form of instruction took place, either in the form of a didactic explanation, or as a set of directions (i.e. how to seek or get to the kingdom of God). The Hebrew word דורש, transcribed as *Doresh*, has two meanings. One is to demand something, which does not fit the context; the other is "to enlighten" or "to tell", which does fit. According to the text, Jesus told (taught) them, or enlightened them about the Kingdom of God.

The second deviation is that Professor Cook left out the passage that Howard put in brackets indicating that Jesus spent the night in Bethany. This, however, is because the text translated by Cook came from a manuscript, Ms. Add. no. 26964, British Library, London, where the passage in brackets is missing.

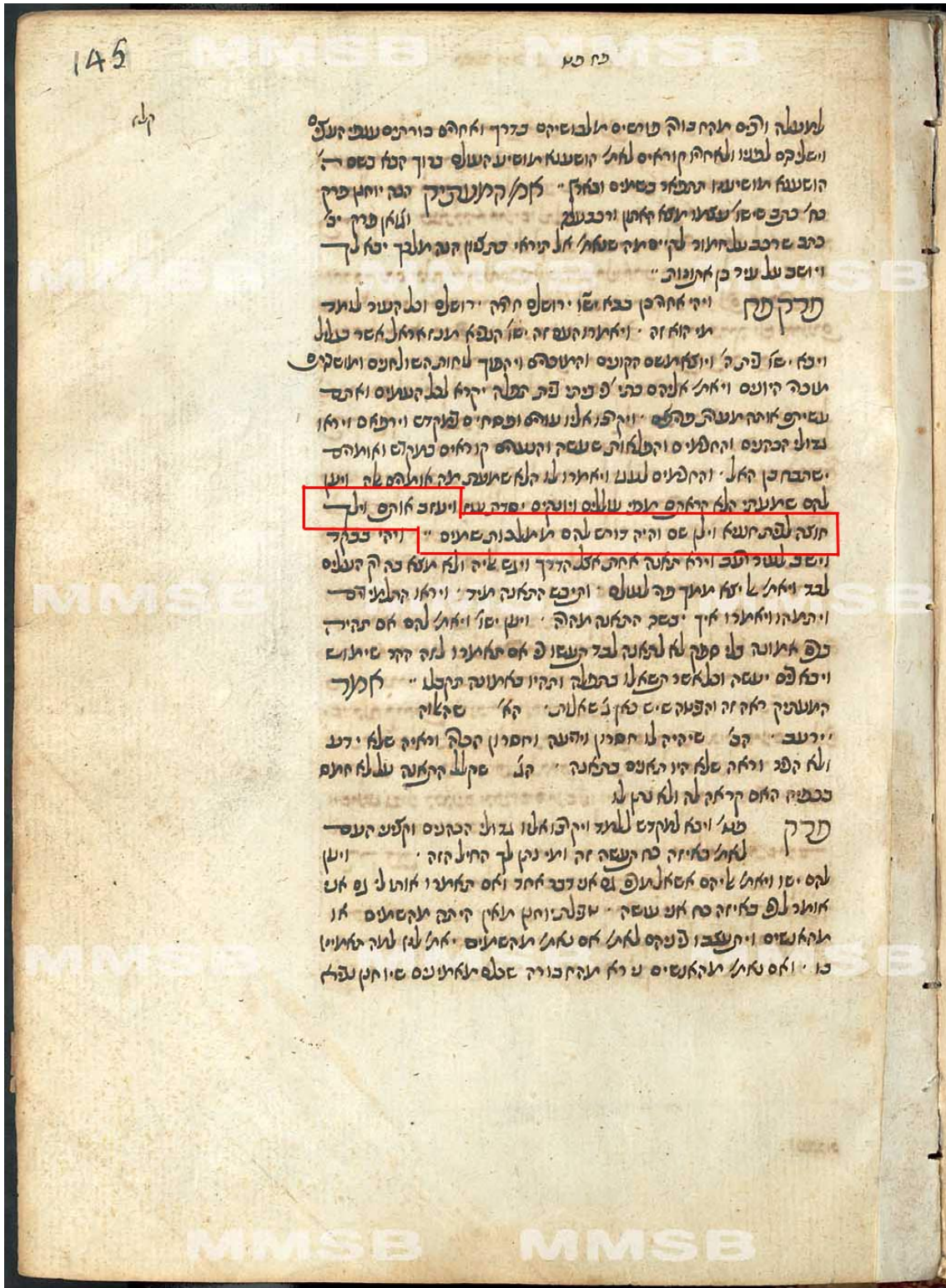
Howard's translation, on the other hand, is a reconstruction based on several other manuscripts (mss A, B, D, E, F and G) (v). Ms. Add. no. 26964 has וילך שם, transcribed as *Vayelech Sham*, which means "and he went there", just as Professor Cook translated it. The other six mss have וילן שם, transcribed as *Vayalun Sham*, which means "and he slept there", or as Howard translates it: "and he spent the night there". This also corresponds to the Greek text of *Matthew*, where the word ἑυλισθη (êulisthê) is used, which means to "lodge" (vii), i.e. "spend the night".

Below is the actual page from Ms. Add. no. 26964 with the relevant part marked by us. As far as we can tell, Howard has correctly transcribed the text.



חבט עוללים ויונקים יספת שנה  
 וילך שם שנים ימים ויבא אל בית מרדכי וישב עמו

The additional text, (spent the night), is present in the manuscript Howard called A; (Ms. Heb. 28. Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden) and other manuscripts. A copy of the actual page from Howard's manuscript A is presented below with the relevant part marked by us.



This document has the complete phrase “and he spent the night there” (וילן שם) instead of the British Library manuscript’s truncated phrase “and he went there” (שם וילך).



### Parallels and Differences

The word “mystery” is not in the Hebrew text. *Hebrew Matthew 21:17* refers only to “the Kingdom of God” but not to “the mystery of the Kingdom of God” as in *Secret Mark*.

According to *Secret Mark*, after he raised the youth from the dead and taught him about the Kingdom of God, Jesus returned to the other side of the Jordan (viii). According to *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew*, after he taught the Kingdom of God, Jesus returned to Jerusalem (ix).

The *Gospel of John* (John 1:28) stated that John the Baptist performed baptisms at “Bethany beyond the Jordan”. This “Bethany beyond the Jordan” appears to be the place where Jesus raised the youth in the *Secret Gospel of Mark*.

This “Bethany beyond the Jordan” seems to be at a different location from the Bethany in *Matthew 21:17* (located an evening’s walk from Jerusalem), which *John 11:18* stated was 3 km (2 miles) from Jerusalem.

The apparent duplication of Bethany’s encountered in the Gospels can be explained with the following arguments.

First, some early manuscripts of the *Gospel of John* used the place name Bethabarah rather than “Bethany beyond the Jordan”. Second, Origen indicated that there was only one Bethany (x). The apparent duplication of Bethany’s was due to confusion of

similar place names. Third, and most importantly, it is likely that *Secret Mark* followed the narrative sequence in the *Gospel of John* rather than the Synoptic Gospels. Instead of returning to Jerusalem after spending the night at Bethany, as he did in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus, following the Resurrection of Lazarus, went to the Jordan River, just as he did in the *Gospel of John* (xi).

In light of this, there are striking intertextual similarities which need to be taken under consideration.

- 1) In both *Secret Mark* and *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew*, a significant incident occurred in a village called Bethany.
- 2) In both texts, Jesus taught [the mystery of] the Kingdom of God.
- 3) In both texts, he taught his disciples, or a recently converted disciple.
- 4) In both texts, the teaching was done at night.

The *Hebrew Matthew* of the *Even Bohan* has many similarities to writings other than just the Greek *Gospel of Matthew*. It reflects readings in other ancient manuscripts such as *Codex Sinaiticus* and the *Gospel of Thomas* (xii).

Finally, a fairly long passage from the *Gospel of Mark* was incorporated into the text of *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* (xiii) (xvii).

While there is some controversy regarding the dating of its various sources, *Shem-Tob Matthew* appears to reflect both well established ancient texts, and texts that have only recently been discovered. It seems likely that it has preserved an otherwise lost tradition of Jesus' night-time teaching of (the mystery of) the Kingdom of God in Bethany. *Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew* used information found in the now lost longer version of *Mark* quoted in *Clement's letter to Theodore*. This information about teaching in Bethany is not found in the shorter standard version of the *Gospel of Mark*.

The *Secret Gospel of Mark* and *Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew* share a common tradition. Since it has been demonstrated that *Secret Mark* is related to an obscure text that was written down in the fourteenth century, it is improbable that the excerpts from *Secret Mark* are a modern forgery.



### **Was Morton Smith aware of Shem-Tob's *Hebrew Matthew*?**

Was Morton Smith aware of Shem-Tob's *Hebrew Matthew* and could he have used it to forge *Secret Mark*? This is unlikely for several reasons.

Shem-Tob's *Hebrew Matthew* had not been transcribed for general distribution, and was not translated into English and published until 1987. Prior to then, neither Morton Smith, nor anyone else, had easy access to, let alone knowledge of a Hebrew text of *Shem-Tob Matthew* (xiv). Smith of course knew Hebrew and theoretically could have found the manuscripts of Shem-Tob Matthew. One manuscript is in the British Library in London, one is in Leiden, three are in Oxford and four are in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York (xv). The Jewish Theological Seminary is just a few streets away from Columbia University where Smith had his office, and Smith did spend time at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

As far as we can tell, Smith did not work with the *Gospel of Matthew* during the 1950s and is not known to have transcribed or translated a Hebrew version of any Gospel. Moreover, Smith was not particularly interested in medieval Jewish manuscripts. As Allan Pantuck tells us: "He once reconstructed a passage of the Dead Sea Scrolls from a book at JTS, but even in this case, he had Shaye Cohen assist him" (xvi). Smith was appointed to the Columbia faculty in the fall of 1957, and discovered *Secret Mark* during the summer of 1958. He had almost no time to find the JTS manuscripts, understand their significance, and then craft a forgery in preparation for his 1958 summer trip to the Mar Saba Monastery. In fact, he wrote in a letter that his heavy class load severely limited his time to do additional work (xvi). Smith also would have had to delete the same phrase from his forgery that was missing from the London Library manuscript, but not from all of the JTS manuscripts. Therefore Smith's having forged Clement's letter becomes a virtual non-issue.

It would take an extraordinary stretch of the imagination to believe that Morton Smith burrowed into a seventeen volume handwritten medieval Jewish text, found a sentence in the Hebrew version of the *Gospel of Matthew*, that is subtly different from the standard Greek text and then used this sentence as the basis of the beginning and end of a forged invented version of the *Gospel of Mark*. He would have to have inserted the word "mystery", replaced the disciples with a youth, used the *Gospel of John* to locate Bethany, and correlated his forgery with episodes from the *Gospel of John* and a narrative lacuna in the *Gospel of Mark*. This scenario should be eliminated by applying Occam's razor.

### **Another “Raising” scene from the *Gospel of Mark* in *Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew***

We have made another discovery. At this point in time, we are not sure if it is just a strange coincidence based on stylistic similarities of the source materials, or if it represents the result of deliberate text borrowing by an ancient redactor in order to preserve a hidden tradition.

As previously stated, *Shem-Tob Matthew* contains a large block of text taken from the *Gospel of Mark* (xvii). The text of *Mark* 9:20–28 was inserted into *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* between *Matthew* 17:17 and *Matthew* 17:19. This is the only large block of text from another Gospel that has been inserted into *Hebrew Matthew*.

*Mark* 9:20–28 is about Jesus healing a boy with a dumb spirit. Jesus rebuked the spirit, and ordered it to leave the boy:

“And [the spirit] cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. And when he was come into the house ...” (*Mark* 9:26–28 from the Greek text of the *Gospel of Mark*)

This is the parallel text from Howard’s translation of the Hebrew text of *Shem-Tob Matthew*:

“... the boy was left as dead so that many were saying that he was dead. Jesus **took him (by the hand), stood him up and he arose.** When Jesus entered **the house** ... (xvii).”

This should be compared to the raising of the youth in the *Secret Gospel of Mark*:

“And straightaway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth **his hand and raised him, seizing his hand.** But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb, **they came into the house of the youth** ...”

(Bold text added for emphasis)

The Greek in the two passages is very close.

**Secret Mark:**

... ἐξέτεινεν τὴν **χειρὰ καὶ ἤγειρεν** αὐτὸν· **κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς** ... ἦλθον εἰς τὴν **οἰκίαν** τοῦ νεανίσκου

**Mk 9:27–28:**

ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς **κρατήσας** αὐτὸν **τῆς χειρὸς ἤγειρεν** αὐτὸν **καὶ** ἀνέστη καὶ εἰσελθόντα αὐτὸν εἰς **οἶκον**

(Color added for emphasis)

**Secret Mark:**

... he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand ... came into the house of the youth.

**Mk 9:27–28:**

But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. And when he was come into the house ...

Isn't it an amazing coincidence that *Secret Mark* has parallels with the only lengthy passage from the *Gospel of Mark* that was incorporated into *Shem Tob Matthew*?

The parallel texts are about Jesus taking the hand of a seemingly dead youth, raising him, and then “coming into a house”. Furthermore, in each example, the “raising episode” is followed by Jesus offering instruction to his disciple(s) (see *Matthew* 17:19–21), which further emphasizes the text parallels.

Additionally, where *Secret Mark* fills in a narrative gap in the received Greek Text of *Mark* (iv); the interpolation of the *Markan* text into *Shem Tob Matthew* fills in a narrative gap in the text of *Matthew* by adding supplementary details about the raising of the young boy.

Finally, *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* 17, *Mark* 9:20–28, and *Secret Mark's* raising of the youth, and the Raising of Lazarus in the *Gospel of John* (*John* 11) have considerable narrative overlap.

All this of course might just be due to a series of coincidences. However, these coincidences are found in a text where Jesus, while in Bethany at night, is said to have taught the disciples the Kingdom of God. One cannot help wondering if an

otherwise lost tradition has been preserved at least in part in this Hebrew text of *Matthew*: a tradition that is also found in the *Secret Gospel of Mark*.

### Concluding Remarks

The *Secret Gospel of Mark* suggests that the Gospels have a complex history of redaction and transmission.

There is a tradition in Shem-Tob's fourteenth century *Hebrew Matthew*, that while spending the night at Bethany, Jesus taught the Kingdom of God to his disciples. This tradition was practically unknown prior to the discovery of brief quotations from the *Secret Gospel of Mark*. This and other narrative and vocabulary parallels lend credibility to *Secret Mark* being an ancient text and not a modern forgery.

David Blocker, Roger Viklund © August 5, 2011

Endnotes:

---

i ) *The Gospel of the Hebrews* is attested by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Hegesippus, Origen, Eusebius, Cyril, Epiphanius, Jerome and others.

ii ) George Howard writes:

“ ... Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew predates the fourteenth century, being preserved primarily by the Jewish community.” (George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995, p. 234)

iii ) Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark*, London Victor Gollancz Ltd. 1974 ISBN 0-575-01801-1.

iv ) This is analogous to the passage in *Mark* 10:46 where the Greek text states that Jesus entered and then left Jericho without anything else occurring:

“And they came to Jericho; and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples ...”

There is an apparent lacuna in the verse, concerning what occurred at Jericho. This verse is augmented in *Secret Gospel of Mark*:

---

“And after the words, ‘And he comes into Jericho,’ the secret Gospel adds only, ‘And the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome were there, and Jesus did not receive them.’”

The *Secret Gospel of Mark* fills in the lacuna in the standard version of *Mark*, by telling what occurred when Jesus passed through Jericho.

v ) George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995, p. xii, p. 102–103.

vi ) Dr. Stephen L. Cook is the Catherine N. McBurney Professor of Old Testament Language and Literature at Virginia Theological Seminary.

vii ) *The New International Version/Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1976, p. 93.

viii ) From *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* quoting the *Secret Gospel of Mark*:

“And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan.”

ix ) Shem Tob Matthew 21:17-18:

“17He left and went out to Bethany and spent the night there and there he was explaining to them the Kingdom of God. 18It came to pass in the morning that he returned to the city hungry.” (George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995, p. 103)

x ) From the *Secret Gospel of Mark*:

“And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan.”

According to some manuscripts of *John* 1:28, John the Baptist baptized at *Bethabarah* or *Betharabah* instead of *Bethany*,

“‘These things happened in Bethabarah on the other side’

EVIDENCE: C2 K Pi Psic 083 0113 f1 f13 33 some Byz syr(c,s) one syr(pal) cop(south)

“‘These things happened in Betharabah on the other side’

EVIDENCE: Sb 892variant”. (A Student’s Guide to New Testament Textual Variants, Bruce Terry, Professor of Bible and Humanities, Chair, School of Biblical Studies, Ohio Valley University, <http://bible.ovc.edu/terry/tc/lay09jhn.htm>, Retrieved July, 2011)

Church fathers such as John Chrysostom and Origen believed the place was called *Bethabarah*. For instance Origen said in his *Commentary to the Gospel of John* (i, 28) that he

---

could not find a place named Bethany along the Jordan, but there was a place called *Bethabarah*, which according to tradition, was linked to John the Baptist?

"We are not ignorant that in nearly all codices Bethany is the reading. But we were persuaded that not Bethany, but Bethabara should be read, when we came to the places that we might observe the footprints of the Lord, of His disciples, and of the prophets. For, as the Evangelist relates, Bethany the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, is distant from Jerusalem fifteen furlongs, while the Jordan is distant one hundred and eighty furlongs. Neither is there a place along the Jordan which has anything in common with the name Bethany. But some say that among the mounds by the Jordan Bethabara is pointed out, where history relates that John baptized". (Breen, A.E. (1907). *Bethany Beyond the Jordan*. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved August 2, 2011 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02532a.htm>)

Flavius Josephus mentioned a village called Bethzub (*Jewish War* 6.3.4 ) which from the text's context, might have been located beyond the Jordan.

This implies that the so-called *Bethany* on the other side of the Jordan was in fact called *Bethabarah*.

xi ) The canonical and synoptic *Gospel of Mark* (11:11–15) and *Gospel of Matthew* (21:17–19), state that Jesus left the city of Jerusalem, spent the night in Bethany, and returned to Jerusalem the next day.

There is no exact parallel in the *Gospel of Luke*. The *Gospel of Luke* does not mention a visit to Bethany. There was a daily teaching at the Temple (*Luke* 19:47) which might parallel the nocturnal teaching at Bethany in *Secret Mark* and *Shem-Tob Matthew*.

In *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* 21:17-18, Jesus left Jerusalem for Bethany where he spent the night explaining the Kingdom of God. He returned to Jerusalem the next day.

In the excerpt from the *Secret Gospel of Mark* contained in *Clement's Letter to Theodore*, Jesus went to Bethany, raised and taught Lazarus and then returned to the other side of the Jordan.

In *John* 11, Jesus traveled from the "place where he was" outside of Judea (*John* 11:6–7) to Bethany, where he freed Lazarus from his tomb (*John* 11:41–44). The Temple Priests issued a death warrant for Jesus (*John* 11:53, 57). Jesus went into hiding and left for a region near the desert, a town called Ephraim (*John* 11:54). Six days before Passover, Jesus returned to Bethany (*John* 12:1) and then went to Jerusalem the next day (*John* 12:12).

The texts are quoted below:

*Mark* 11:11–15:

"11And he entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

---

12On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. ... 15And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the Temple ...”

*Matthew 21:17-18:*

“... and leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there. 18In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he was hungry.”

*Shem-Tob Matthew 21:17-18:*

“17He left and went out to Bethany and spent the night there and there he was explaining to them the Kingdom of God. 18It came to pass in the morning that he returned to the city hungry.”

*Secret Mark:*

“And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan.”

*John 11 et seq.:*

*John 11:17:* “When Jesus arrived ... 18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away.”

*John 11:54:* “he left for the region near the desert to a town called Ephraim, and there he remained with his disciples.”

*John 12:1:* “... Jesus came to Bethany, ...”

*John 12:12:* “On the next day, when the great crowd ... heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, they ... went out to meet him.”

Ephraim is traditionally located about twelve miles northwest of Jerusalem where the mountains descend into the Jordan Valley (From: Footnote to John 11:54, *New American Bible*, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. 1970). Ephraim was mentioned by Josephus as being a small town near Bethel (Josephus, *Jewish War* 4.55). Ephraim has been identified with the modern et-Tayibeh, about 4 miles NW of Bethel (F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids Michigan. 1983, p. 252). et-Tayibeh is located in the Jordan Valley, between tributaries of the river.

In the *Gospel of John*, like the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, Jesus left Bethany and went down into the Jordan Valley after he released a youth from a tomb. The location of Ephraim is not certain, but even if Jesus did not actually cross over the Jordan when he went to Ephraim, he was in close proximity to the Jordan; that is he was situated just across from the Jordan.

In his letter to Theodore, Clement wrote: “After these words follow the text, ‘And James and John come to him’, and all that section.” This corresponds to *Mark 10:35\** (parallel *Matthew 20:20*) where the Zebedees requested precedence over the other disciples. This took place when Jesus was going up to Jerusalem (*Mark 10:32*) after having first gone beyond the Jordan to teach (*Mark 10:1*).

---

At this point it is evident that the relationship between the texts is far from straightforward, and reveals that there was a very complex history of redaction and transmission of the Jesus legend. The links between texts are exposed by examining non canonical gospels.

We have demonstrated that there was a tradition of Jesus teaching and crossing the Jordan, and then returning to Jerusalem. This tradition is found in both in the *Gospel of Mark* and the *Gospel of John*, and its presence is implied in the *Secret Gospel of Mark*. In both the *Gospel of John* and the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, Jesus went down into the Jordan Valley, after releasing a young man from his tomb.

\* *Mark* 10:35-37:

“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, ‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.’ And he said to them, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ And they said to him, ‘Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.’”

xii ) George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995. Part 2. Analysis and Commentary.

xiii ) See discussion in this essay’s chapter “**Another “Raising” scene from the Gospel of Mark in Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew**”.

xiv ) A translation of the du Tillet version of *Hebrew Matthew* had been published in 1927. du Tillet *Hebrew Matthew* is a different text type from Shem Tob *Hebrew Matthew*. The text of du Tillet *Hebrew Matthew* 21:17 is the same as the verse in canonical Matthew. Schonfield’s translation of du Tillet *Hebrew Matthew* gives no indication that the Shem-Tob text of this verse was different from the verse in the canonical text. Schonfield, Hugh J. *An Old Hebrew Text of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, T & T Clark, 1927, p. 142.

xv ) The list of manuscripts consulted by Professor George Howard:

“Ms. Add. no. 26964. British Library, London. (Serves as the printed text for Matthew 1:1-23:22.)

A Ms. Heb. 28. Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden.

B Ms. Mich. 119. Bodleian Library, Oxford

C Ms. Opp. Add. 4° 72. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

D Ms. 2426 (Marx 16). Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, (Serves as the printed text for Matthew 23:23-end.)

E Ms. 2279 (Marx 18). Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York.

F Ms. 2209 (Marx 19). Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York.



---

G Ms. 2234 (Marx 15). Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York.

H Ms. Mich. 137. Bodleian Library, Oxford.”

(George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press. 1995, p. xii)

xvi ) Personal communication with Allan Pantuck, July 22, 2011. Alan J. Pantuck was one of Morton Smith’s students and is a current defender of Morton Smith’s literary estate. Alan J. Pantuck, MD, MS, FACS, UCLA School of Medicine, Los Angeles, California.

xvii ) George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press. 1995, p. 85, 87. The text of *Mark* 9:20–28 was inserted into *Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew* between *Matthew* 17:17 and *Matthew* 17:19.