

There are other interesting features of the Gospel of the Ebionites, known from the quotations of Epiphanius, the fourth-century heresiologist (= heresy-hunter). We wish we had the whole Gospel. We have only these eight fragments that Epiphanius quotes. We wish we knew who actually used the Gospel. We wish we knew how long it was, what it contained, and what it's theological slant was. It is almost impossible to say from what remains.

One big question is whether, since it was used by the Ebionites - according to Epiphanius, it had a particular bias in its reporting of the words and deeds of Jesus.

The term "Ebionite" was widely used in proto-orthodox and orthodox sources to refer to "Jewish-Christian" groups, or at least one group (it is likely that there were lots of these groups, and it may be that the church fathers assumed they were all the same group when in fact they had different views, different theologies, different practices, and so on). Some of the church fathers indicate that the name came from the founder of the group Ebion. But that's a legend. Almost certainly the term came from the Hebrew word "Ebyon" which means "poor." The normal hypothesis is that these Jewish-Christians accepted the early Christian policy of giving away their possessions for others and so took on lives of voluntary poverty. The church fathers who know the linguistic meaning of their name claimed that they were called "the poor ones" because they were "poor in faith." (!)

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