

ARE THE CANONICAL GOSPELS TO BE IDENTIFIED AS
A GENRE OF GRECO-ROMAN BIOGRAPHY?
THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS SAYS ‘NO’

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Liberal-critical and evangelical-critical scholarship have recently attempted to identify the Gospels with the ancient style of writing known as Greco-Roman biography. The author has already established this position as highly tenuous, reflecting a cycle in New Testament studies that often seeks novelty in interpretation (cf. Acts 17:21, καινότερον—“new,” “unique,” “novel”). A close examination of the nascent church fathers, especially as found in the first great church historian, Eusebius, reveals that the early church decidedly rejected the Greco-Roman historiographic tradition. Prominent early fathers deprecated the quality of historians like Thucydides and Plutarch who are now identified with the Gospel tradition in New Testament scholarship. Instead, the early fathers identified the historiography of the Gospels with the Hebrew tradition as evidenced in the Old Testament, reflecting the historical genre of Old Testament promise, now seeing the fulfilment of those promises. They also affirmed the absolute trustworthiness and accuracy of the canonical Gospels as produced of the Holy Spirit of Truth. Once again, critical scholarship, being influenced by the Enlightenment, has chosen to disregard the voice of the early church as the nature of the Gospels.

Introduction to the Problem

In a prior article,¹ the current New Testament discipline's ongoing fad of identifying the canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as following the pattern for the writing or historiography of ancient Greco-Roman biography was refuted. Instead, the Gospel accounts are to be identified with the Old Testament historiographic tradition of promise (OT) and fulfillment (NT). The importance of this distinction centers in the acute tendency of the Greco-Roman historiographical idea to negate the historicity of the Gospels as they center in Jesus Christ. While the Greco-Roman tradition often invented and/or created traditions about historical events, the canonical Gospels most certainly did not do so. Rather, the Gospel writers anchored their material in the historical eye-witness accounts of those who directly interacted with Jesus and the events surrounding His life. The nascent, earliest church identified the Gospel of Matthew as written by Levi, the Tax Collector. John directly linked himself with "those who beheld His glory" when the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14; John 14:26; 16:13; 1 John 1:1-4; 4:4-6). Luke was understood as having direct contact with eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4), and the Gospel of Mark was the preaching of the Apostle Peter.²

Strategically, this refutation of the Greco-Roman historiography hypothesis as being the model for the Gospel accounts also finds strong support among the ancient church fathers, especially those of the earliest periods of the nascent church. This article will examine strategic references that support the idea (1) that the early fathers taught the Gospels as anchored to the promise and fulfillment pattern of the Old Testament and (2) that the early fathers sharply distinguished the historiography of the Gospels from the ancient Greco-Roman tradition.

Eusebius of Caesarea's works, especially that of *Preparation for the Gospel*, provide strong evidence that not only have more liberal evangelical scholars, like Charles H. Talbert, Richard A. Burridge, and David Aune erroneously linked the canonical Gospels to the wrong paradigm of Greco-Roman biography, but so also, as a result of uniting with their liberal counterparts, evangelical critical scholars like Michael Licona, Craig Evans, Darrell Bock and Craig Blomberg, have also chosen the wrong paradigm for the genre of the canonical Gospels by their support of the Greco-Roman hypothesis.³

¹ F. David Farnell, "Do The Canonical Gospels Reflect Greco-Roman Biographical Genre or Are They Modelled After the Old Testament Books?," *MSJ* 30 no. 1 (Spring 2019): 5-44.

² E.g., Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* III.XXXIX.1-17. For further information, see F. David Farnell, "The Synoptic Gospels in the Ancient Church: A Testimony to the Priority of Matthew's Gospel," *MSJ* 10 no. 1 (Spring 1999) 53-86; idem. "How Views of Inspiration Have Impacted Synoptic Problem Discussions," *MSJ* 13 no. 1 (Spring 2002): 33-64.

³ Charles H. Talbert, *What Is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1977), 133-35; Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 233-51; Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1-33; Michael R. Licona, "Introduction," in *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn From Ancient Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2017), 1-8; Craig Evans, "Foreword," in *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels*, ix-xi; Darrell L. Bock, "Precision and Accuracy: Making Distinctions in the Cultural Context," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 368; see also "An Interview with Dr. Craig Blomberg," *LogosTalk*, April 22, 2013, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://blog.logos.com/2013/04/an-interview-with-dr-craig-blomberg/>.

Several important arguments in relation to Eusebius' works need highlighting as an introduction to this subject. First, Eusebius' fifteen-book work of great significance in this regard, entitled *Preparatio Evangelica*, or *Preparation for the Gospel*, is the first part of his larger work, entitled *Demonstratio Evangelica*. Edwin H. Gifford describes Eusebius' effort here "as the most systematic and comprehensive of many apologetic works of Christian antiquity."⁴ More significantly, Eusebius as the first great church historian, as well as an eminent theologian of the recently converted Constantine, in his *Preparation for the Gospel*, set forth a comprehensive defense of Christianity.⁵ David L. Dungan insightfully observed in his study of Eusebius' attitude toward the Greco-Roman tradition, entitled *Constantine's Bible*, that *Preparation for the Gospel* "defended the Christian rejection of the confused, immoral, and self-contradictory Greco-Roman tradition."⁶ These are hardly terms that would be applied if Eusebius truly believed that the Gospels partook of such historiographical lineage as evidenced by either the Greeks or Romans.

Second, in Eusebius' even larger second book, entitled *Proof of the Gospel*, Eusebius affirmed that the Gospel writers patterned their writings, as well as their belief systems, after the Jewish historiographical tradition as evidenced in the Old Testament canonical books.

Third, Eusebius' work, entitled *Ecclesiastical History*, demonstrated the absolute certainty of the New Testament canon, especially the four canonical Gospels, which he termed the "holy tetrad of the Gospels" (τὴν ἁγίαν τῶν εὐαγγελίων τετρακτῶν). According to Eusebius, any book in the New Testament that was accepted by the church had to be "true, genuine, and recognized."⁷ The Church in his day investigated this "holy tetrad" and accepted it with absolute certainty that it been written by the individuals whose names Christian tradition had attached to them.⁸ Indeed, for Eusebius, the ancient bishops from the earliest times of the church to his day, through an unbroken chain, had received these four Gospels (as well as the other canonical NT books) as genuine, as books that were absolutely authentic with regard to authorship and content.⁹ Indeed, these were the four Gospels that the early church's orthodox bishops had approved as authoritatively genuine without question.¹⁰

In summary, Eusebius presented in his *Ecclesiastical History* the evidence that the canonical Gospels, as well as the other books of the NT, were "as hard as granite" in terms of their genuine witness by the earliest parts of the church.¹¹ These were the undisputed accounts that the earliest church had absolute certainty as to their origin by direct apostolic witnesses who wrote these accounts of Jesus' life.

⁴ Edwin Hamilton Gifford, "Preface," in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, vol. 1 (Books 1–9), trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford (1903; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), v.

⁵ David L. Dungan, *Constantine's Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 59.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* III.XXV.6.

⁸ *Ibid.* III.XXV.1.

⁹ On the passing down of exact information regarding authenticity of the books used by the earliest church see *Ibid.*, III.III.1–3; XXXVII.II; VI.XXII.3).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, III.XXV.1.

¹¹ Dungan, *Constantine's Bible*, 92.

Fourth, also strategically important is that Eusebius affirmed the ability of the Gospels to be fully harmonized, as evidenced in his production of fourth work, *Sections and Canons*.¹² This work provided a table of Gospel pericopes of single, double, and triple parallels to function as a guide in verifying the harmony and concord of the Gospel accounts of Jesus. This table served to an answer to attacks on Christianity, especially the neoplatonistic philosopher Porphyry of Tyre (ca. 234–305), who excelled in collecting and summarizing the attacks in his massive 15-part work, entitled *Against the Christians* (Κατὰ Χριστιανῶν; or *Adversus Christianos*).¹³ Eusebius' *Sections and Canons* is so important that the Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testament Graece*, 28th Edition (as well as the earlier editions) still use them in the inner margins.¹⁴ All four of Eusebius' works, *Preparation for the Gospel*, *Proof of the Gospel*, *Ecclesiastical History*, and *Sections and Canons*, constitute his formal defense of charges against Christianity that had been conducted by its enemies prior to the legalization of the Christian faith in Rome.¹⁵

What follows is a special look at the first of Eusebius' works, *Preparation for the Gospel*, to highlight how Eusebius distanced Christianity and its Gospels from Greco-Roman tradition.

Eusebius of Caesarea: The First Great Ancient Church Historian

Who was Eusebius, and why were his scholarly investigations and resultant writings so strategic and significant for the issue of the Gospels and the entire New Testament canon?

¹² For an electronic version, see <https://danielbwallace.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/eusebian-canon-conversion-table.pdf>, accessed November 4, 2019.

¹³ Porphyry asserted that the Gospel writers contradicted one another. For Eusebius, Porphyry's criticisms were a grave, potentially fatal, danger to Christianity, and many in the early church concurred. For more discussion of Porphyry's attacks, see David Laird Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 98–111. Porphyry's work had occurred at an unfortunate time in the history of Christianity, during a lull in Roman persecution sometime around AD 270. The damage of Porphyry's arguments revived anti-Christian sentiment among pagan philosophers and Roman officials. Unfortunately, Porphyry's work is no longer extant, for it was condemned by religious authorities and all copies burned (including commentaries on it) when Christianity gained ascendancy. Nevertheless, the church's memory of Porphyry's damage to the Church was long, for Augustine (AD 354–430) related, "Porphyry, the most learned of the philosophers (and) the bitterest enemy of the Christians" (Augustine, *City of God*, 1.22, in Book XIX:22 of NCF, Series I, vol. II, 947). Even in the 19th Century, the German critic, Adolf Harnack (1851–1930) described Porphyry's criticisms in the following startling terms, "This work of Porphyry is perhaps the most ample and thoroughgoing treatise which has ever been written against Christianity. It earned for its author the titles πάντων δυσμενέστατος και πολεμώτατος ('most malicious and hostile of all') 'hostis dei, veritatis inimicus,' 'sceleratarum atrium magister' (God's enemy, a foe to truth, a master of accursed arts), and so forth. But, although our estimate can only be based on fragments, it is not too much to say that the controversy between the philosophy of religion and Christianity lies today in the very position in which Porphyry placed it. Even at this time of day Porphyry remains unanswered." In Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. and ed. James Moffatt, 2nd ed. (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1908), 1:505.

¹⁴ See "Conversion Table for the Eusebian Canons," *Daniel B. Wallace*, April 13, 2014, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://danielbwallace.com/2014/04/13/conversion-table-for-the-eusebian-canon/>.

¹⁵ Eusebius also authored *Against Porphyry*, which consisted of twenty-five books but it did not survive.

Eusebius (ca. 260–339/340)¹⁶ was the preeminent historian and biblical scholar of the Emperor Constantine I, who ruled from AD 306–37, and as sole Emperor from 324–37. Eusebius was a prolific writer, biblical scholar, and apologist for the earliest times of Christianity. Many credit him with the invention of the genre of Christian church history and chronology as well as being the most important source for the reign of Constantine.¹⁷ From his election as bishop of Caesarea until his death he played a crucial role in ecclesiastical politics, especially in the eastern empire.

The strategic importance of Eusebius is not only his immense scholarship but also that his research had direct touch with the earliest historical records of Christianity—he attended and assented to the decisions of the council of Nicaea in AD 325. While Eusebius’ integrity as a historian has sometimes been challenged, the authenticity of Eusebius’ works as coming directly from him have been vindicated over time.¹⁸

In his defense of Christianity and its critics, especially but not exclusively centered in Porphyry, Eusebius produced his four strategic works. Moreover, while the development of the idea of a canon or rule of authority may have come from Greek philosophical schools with its idea of *polis* as a metaphor for accuracy, correctness, and truth,¹⁹ Eusebius skillfully distanced himself from the historiography of the ancient Greek tradition, focusing on the uniqueness of the authoritative documents of the New Testament, especially the canonical Gospels.

Indeed, though in some ways the church had been influenced broadly by the Greek cultural and philosophical idea of gathering the genuine copies of teachings, examples, and writings of any founder of a system, as well as his disciples, this does not mean that the church had described the New Testament authoritative writings in terms of the *historiographical* ways of the Greek philosophical schools. Dungan observes:

It was not until the fourth century, after the Roman emperor had stepped in and—with the whole-hearted assistance of the orthodox bishops—took de facto charge of aspects of the Catholic church’s doctrine, polity, and scripture selection, that the first occurrence of the term canon of scripture appeared, consisting of a list of the approved writings of the Old and New Testament, and the Greek term *kanōn* came to be increasingly used in the narrow Latin sense of *regula* = law.²⁰

This distinction between the New Testament writings from Greco-Roman historiography is very evident in Eusebius’ writings.

¹⁶ His most usual designation was “Eusebius of Pamphilus,” with Pamphilus being somehow closely connected to him most likely as friend. Many believe that quite possibly Eusebius was adopted by Pamphilus (martyred AD 310) as the latter’s heir in the phrase, Εὐσέβιος ὁ Παμφίλου found in a scribal Scholion in his work *Preparation for the Gospel*. See Gifford, “Preface,” in *Preparation for the Gospel*, ix.

¹⁷ Indeed, Eusebius is credited with the work, *The Life of Constantine (Vita Constantini)*, which is recognized as the main source for the religious policy of Constantine the Great, though it details many other aspects of his life. See Eusebius *Life of Constantine*. Translated with an Introduction and Commentary by Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999).

¹⁸ Unfortunately, no contemporary biography of Eusebius is extant. Eusebius’ successor, Acacius, produced one but it is now lost. What remain are a few vague statements of later writers as well as evidence of his extant writings.

¹⁹ Dungan, *Constantine’s Bible*, 26–31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30

The Strategic Evidence from Eusebius' *Preparation of the Gospel*

Some observations at the outset must be made from an examination of Eusebius' central arguments in *Preparation for the Gospel*. Importantly, he considers ancient writers who were historians, like Plutarch and Thucydides, whom he specifically mentions among many more, to be foundationally faulty in their learning and historiographical endeavors, and filled with inaccuracy and contradiction. These allegations were not only Eusebius' opinion but were cited by many previous Christian writers that Eusebius quotes extensively (e.g., Clement, Tatian) and Hebrew writers (e.g., Josephus). Moreover, Eusebius' carefully catalogues that even these very same hellenistic writers disagreed significantly amongst themselves, manifestly contradicting each other. Eusebius takes great care to emphasize the inconsistency and contradiction within the Greco-Roman tradition, as well as a faulty writing tradition of the ancients.

Eusebius, moreover, is not positive about any ancient historians that had prominence in his day. This deserves special mention, since liberal, as well as evangelical, critical scholars, present some of these writers especially as the pattern of Greco-Roman historiography being the pattern for the Gospels. As will be seen, Eusebius championed the ancient Hebrew tradition that was the pattern for Christianity and its documents. Eusebius mentions many Greco-Roman authors and concludes negatively for them. Important also is the fact that the rejection of these writers is not only confined to Eusebius but he quotes many others of the Jewish-Christian tradition, such as Josephus and Clement of Alexandria for support of the rejection of the Greco-Roman writing tradition. As Gifford's introduction to *Preparation for the Gospel* long ago observed, "[M]any of [Eusebius'] arguments [against the historians/philosophers] are the same as those of the earlier Apologies, Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen; that he consistently borrows long passages from their writings, including the same quotations from Greek authors, reproduced word for word with due acknowledgement. The particular value of the *Preparatio* resulting from this wealth of quotation is universally acknowledged."²¹

Therefore, Eusebius' negativity regarding the ancient historiographical tradition is not merely his opinion, but as the Church's first great historian, he would likely represent the thinking of the orthodox church in the Roman empire of his day. His work is a comprehensive defense of Christian truth and a rejection of preeminent Greek historians who stand as notables in history writing known in his day. While admittedly he is, on occasion, more positive of Plato and his tradition, as being more in agreement with Hebrew Scriptures, Eusebius strongly concludes in book XV, "We must therefore carefully observe that the oldest of their theologians [of the Greco-Roman tradition] were proved on the highest testimony to have no special knowledge of history, but to rely solely on fables."²²

Eusebius ties these "theologians" directly into their historical tradition when he notes, "[I]n the first three books [of *Preparation*], I thoroughly examined not only the fables concerning their gods which have been turned into ridicule by their own

²¹ Gifford, "Preface," in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, xvi.

²² Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, XV.I.c, 848. Hereafter, the page number in parenthesis represents the pagination of Gifford's translation.

theologians and poets, but also the solemn and secret physical theories of these latter, which have been transported by their grand philosophy high up to heaven and to the various parts of the world.”²³

Eusebius accomplished his deprecation of these ancient sources by limiting his own contributions and compiling a numerous wealth of quotes from ancient classical philosophers of Greece in great length.²⁴ Interestingly, some of the authors quoted by Eusebius are not extant or known except through Eusebius’ extensive quoting of them. Importantly, after effectively countering these sources with the superiority of the Christian message, Eusebius further argued that he, in his work, brought “the fine philosophy of the Greeks” and laid “bare before the eyes of all the useless learning therein.”²⁵ Eusebius’ contention is that he has set forth “with well-judged and sound reasoning” that the “religion and philosophy” of the Hebrews, “is both ancient and true, in preference to that of the Greeks.”²⁶ As will be seen, for Eusebius, the canonical Gospels are anchored not to Greco-Roman historiography, but to that of the Hebrew (OT) materials.

Eusebius’ *Preparation for the Gospel* is crucial evidence against comparing the Gospels to the ancient writing practices that evangelicals promote in Greco-Roman biography hypotheses. In his introduction to this work, he sets forth the theme, which is “to show the nature of Christianity to those who know not what it means.”²⁷ He defends Christianity against Greek (e.g., Porphyry, Seneca) and Jewish critics of his day and in the past. These objections by opponents encompass three basic areas: (1) Christians have abandoned the ancestral religions of the Greeks (V.a2); (2) Christians have accepted the foreign doctrines of the Barbarians, i.e., Jews (5b); and (3) Christian inconsistency in rejecting Jewish sacrifices, rites, and general manner of life, while appropriating their sacred Scripture (i.e., Old Testament) and promised blessings (5c), this latter point being more fully developed in his *The Proof of the Gospel*.²⁸

In books (I–III) of *Preparation for the Gospel*, Eusebius criticizes pagan theology, mythical, allegorical, and political culture; in the next three books, IV–VI he refutes the chief oracles, worship of demons, and various opinions of Greek philosophers on such areas as fate and free will; in books VII–IX Eusebius demonstrates the superiority of the Hebrew religion based in testimony of various authors as the excellence of the Scriptural writings in the Old Testament and the absolute truth of their history; in Books X–XII Eusebius castigates the Greeks asserting that the Greeks had been plagiarizers of philosophy and theology from the Hebrews, asserting that even Plato was dependent upon Moses; and in the last three books (XIII–XV), he continued his comparison of

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ As Gifford notes, Eusebius gathered “a great multitude” of quotes “from all parts of the Greek literature of a thousand years, from works both known and unknown of poets, historians, and philosophers.” Gifford, “Preface,” in Eusebius *Preparation for the Gospel*, xvi.

²⁵ Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, XV.1.a, 850.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., I.1a, 1.

²⁸ See Gifford, in Eusebius *Preparation for the Gospel*, xviii.

Plato with Moses, adding more information on contradictions of other Greek philosophers, with special attention to the Peripatetics and Stoics.²⁹

Eusebius Cites Long Christian (and Jewish) Tradition that the Greeks Were Mere Plagiarizers

In the second part of *Preparation for the Gospel* (Books IX–XV), Eusebius cites a long Christian tradition from earlier Christian writers that the Greeks were mere plagiarizers. Strategically, he demonstrates by extensive quoting from Christian writers before him that such an idea was not original to him but maintained by a prestigious Christian heritage from the earliest period of Christianity. Eusebius writes:

But you must not be surprised if we say that possibly the doctrine of the Hebrews have been plagiarised by them, since they [Greeks] are not only proved to have stolen the other branches of learning from Egyptians and Chaldees and the rest of the barbarous nations, but even to the present day are detected in robbing one another of the honours gained in their own writers.

At all events one after another they surreptitiously steal the phrases of their neighbors together with the thoughts and whole arrangement of treatises, and pride themselves as if upon their own labours. And do not suppose that this is my statement for you shall again hear the very wisest of them convicting one another of theft in their writings.³⁰

A few of many examples must suffice here. In substantiating this position, Eusebius in Book X quotes *Miscellanies* by Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) as to the plagiarism by the Greeks:

Come, and let us adduce the Greeks as witnesses against themselves to the theft. For, inasmuch as they pilfer from one another, they establish the fact that they are thieves; and although against their will, they are detected, clandestinely appropriating to those of their own race the truth which belongs to us. For if they do not keep their hands from each other, they will hardly do it from our authors. I shall say nothing of philosophic dogmas, since the very persons who are the authors of the divisions into sects, confess in writing, so as not to be convicted of ingratitude, that they have received from Socrates the most important of their dogmas. But after availing myself of a few testimonies of men most talked of, and of repute among the Greeks, and exposing their plagiarizing style.³¹

Clement speaks negatively of Orpheus, Heraclitus, Plato, Pythagoras, Herodotus, Theopompus, *Thucydides* [emphasis added], Demosthenes, Aeschines, Lysias,

²⁹ Ibid., xviii–xix. The categories referenced here receive capitalization in Gifford's introduction.

³⁰ Ibid., X.I., 491.

³¹ Ibid; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* (or *Miscellanies*), VI.ii., in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2., ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. William Wilson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 119. *Ante-Nicene Fathers* is hereafter abbreviated ANF.

Isocrates, and many others who steal from others. Clement further notes after extensive citing of these famous Greek writers:

Let these species, then, of Greek plagiarism of sentiments, being such, stand as sufficient for a clear specimen to him who is capable of perceiving.

And not only have they been detected pirating and paraphrasing thoughts and expressions, as will be shown; but they will also be convicted of the possession of what is entirely stolen. For stealing entirely what is the production of others, they have published it as their own; as Eugamon of Cyrene did the entire book on the Thesprotians from Musæus, and Pisander of Camirus the Heraclea of Pisinus of Lindus, and Panyasis of Halicarnassus, the capture of Œchalia from Cleophilus of Samos.³²

Again, Clement is quoted in a lengthy statement, saying, “For life would fail me, were I to undertake to go over the subject in detail, to expose the selfish plagiarism of the Greeks, and how they claim the discovery of the best of their doctrines, which they have received from us.”³³ And again:

And now they are convicted not only of borrowing doctrines from the Barbarians, but also of relating as prodigies of Hellenic mythology the marvels found in our records, wrought through divine power from above, by those who led holy lives, while devoting attention to us. And we shall ask at them whether those things which they relate are true or false. But they will not say that they are false; for they will not with their will condemn themselves of the very great silliness of composing falsehoods, but of necessity admit them to be true.³⁴

Eusebius comments at the end of the quotation from Clement with the following: “[T]o this Clement subjoined countless instances and convicted the Greeks of having been plagiarists by indisputable proofs.”³⁵

Interestingly, Eusebius also cites the Jewish historian Josephus [AD 37–ca. 100] as another historian and authority to the inaccurate and/or false historical reporting of Greek historians, mentioning criticism of Thucydides, and arguing that Greek historiography was not to be trusted:

My first thought is one of intense astonishment at the current opinion that, in the study of primeval worthy as history, the Greeks alone deserve serious attention, that the truth should be sought from them, and that neither we nor any others in the world are to be trusted. In my view the very reverse of this is the case, if, that is to say, we are not to take idle prejudices as our guide, but to extract the truth from the facts themselves....

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., VI.iii.

³⁵ Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, X.II, 494.

Surely, then, it is absurd that the Greeks should be so conceited as to think themselves the sole possessors of a knowledge of antiquity and the only accurate reporters of its history. Anyone can easily discover from the historians themselves that their writings have no basis of sure knowledge, but merely present the facts as conjectured by individual authors. More often than not they confute each other in their works, not hesitating to give the most contradictory accounts of the same events....

What need, however, to speak of the histories of individual states and matters of minor importance, when contradictory accounts of the Persian invasion and the events which accompanied it have been given by writers of the first rank? On many points even Thucydides is accused of error by some critics, notwithstanding his reputation for writing the most accurate history of his time....

For such inconsistency many other causes might possibly be found if one cared to look for them; for my part, I attach the greatest weight to the two which I proceed to mention. I will begin with that to keep which I regard as the more fundamental. The main responsibility for the errors of later historians who aspired to write on antiquity and for the licence granted to their mendacity rests with the original neglect of the Greeks to keep official records of current events. This neglect was not confined to the lesser Greek states. Even among the Athenians, who are reputed to be indigenous and devoted to learning, we find that nothing of the kind existed, and their most ancient public records are said to be the laws on homicide drafted for them by Dracon, a man who lived only a little before the despotism of Pisistratus. Of the Arcadians and their vaunted antiquity it is unnecessary to speak, since even at a later date they had hardly learnt the alphabet.³⁶

Eusebius then cites Tatian's (AD ca. 120–180) *Address to the Greeks* as another authority that rejected Greco-Roman tradition. Tatian, who was a pupil of Justin Martyr and author of the *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the four gospels, composed his apology approximately between 155–165. Eusebius quotes Tatian as follows:

But now it seems proper for me to demonstrate that our philosophy is older than the systems of the Greeks. Moses and Homer shall be our limits, each of them being of great antiquity; the one being the oldest of poets and historians, and the other the founder of all barbarian wisdom. Let us, then, institute a comparison between them; and we shall find that our doctrines are older, not only than those of the Greeks, but than the invention of letters.³⁷

³⁶ Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.2–4, in *Josephus: The Life, Against Apion*, ed. H. St. J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926). See Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, X.VII (510–13).

³⁷ Tatian, *Address of Tatian to the Greeks*, XXXI, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2., ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. J.E. Ryland (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885).

Tatian,³⁸ a hearer of Justin Martyr, was an Assyrian Christian writer and theologian of the second century, who produced the first known harmony of the Gospels, entitling it the *Diatessaron*. His harmony is strategic because it reflects the early nascent church's belief in the ability of the Gospels to be fully harmonized in their entirety into one single Gospel without contradictions.³⁹ Tatian's work demonstrates clear evidence of the importance and authority of the four canonical Gospels in the mid-second century. Tatian's *Diatessaron* was still in use at the time of Eusebius who made reference to it.⁴⁰

Others in the early church continued to produce harmonies that reflected the early church's belief that the four gospels had no essential contradictions or errors. In his final writing, *The Retractions*, Augustine wrote that he composed his Harmony of the Gospels "because of those who falsely accuse the Evangelists of lacking agreement."⁴¹

In *Preparation for the Gospel* XV, Eusebius summarizes his thoughts concerning his deprecation of Greek historians/historiography as follows:

[I]n the first three books [I–III].... We must therefore carefully observe the oldest of their theologians were proved on the highest testimony to have no special knowledge of history, but to rely solely on the fables.... [A]nd for proof against them [Books IV–VI] I made use not only of my own dialectic efforts but also especially of the sayings of the Greek philosophers themselves....

Next in order I refused the method of the Greeks, and clearly showed how they were helped in all things by Barbarians, and that they bring forward no serious learning of their own....

Again the next three books [Books VII–IX] showed the agreement of the best-esteemed philosophers of the Greeks with the opinion of the Hebrews, and again make their own utterances my witnesses....

I have brought forward my proofs, that with no want of consideration, but with well-judged reasoning, we have chosen the philosophy and religion of the Hebrews, which is both ancient and true, in preference to that of the Greeks, which result was also confirmed by the statements of the Greeks.⁴²

Eusebius comments regarding his final chapter XV in *Preparation* that he would add final proof of "the solemn doctrines of the fine philosophy of the Greeks,... laying bare before the eyes of all the useless learning therein. And before all things we shall show that not from ignorance the things which they admire, but from contempt of the unprofitable study therein we have cared very little for them, and devoted our own souls

³⁸ Tatian, in later years fell into heresy according to Irenaeus, having aberrant views on marriage and denying that Adam received salvation after the fall. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I.XXVIII.1.

³⁹ The *Diatessaron* "signified the meticulous fitting together of the four Gospels into a single seamless narrative, harmonizing them." Dungan, *Constantine's Bible*, 41.

⁴⁰ F. L. Cross, ed., "Diatessaron," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press. 2005), XXX.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Retractions*, 42, in *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. Mary Inez Bogan (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1968), 60:150.

⁴² Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, XV.I (848–50).

to the practice of things far better.”⁴³ And again, Eusebius spares no one of these famous ancient authorities, issuing sweeping negative conclusions:

We have seen that the philosophy of Plato sometimes agreeing with the doctrines of the Hebrews, and sometimes at variance with them, wherein it has been proved [Plato’s] to disagree even with its own favorite dogmas; while as to the doctrines of the other philosophers, the physicists, as they are called, and those of the Platonic succession, and Xenophanes and Parmenides, moreover of Pyrrho, and those who introduce the ‘suspension of judgment,’ and all the rest whose opinions have been refuted in the preceding discourse, we have seen that they stand in opposition alike to the doctrines of the Hebrews and of Plato and to the truth itself, and moreover have received their refutation by means of their own weapons.⁴⁴

Instead, Eusebius argues, “We have preferred the truth and piety found among those who have been regarded as Barbarians to all the wisdom of the Greeks, not in ignorance of their fine doctrines, but by a well examined and thoroughly tested judgement.”⁴⁵ He summarizes, based upon his analysis of the Greco-Roman historian Plutarch’s own collections, that they all contradict each other:

Now all these questions have been treated in a number of ways by the philosophers of whom we speak, but since Plutarch collected them in a few concise words, by bringing together the opinions of them all and their contractions, I think it will not be unprofitable to us if they are presented with a view to their rejection on reasonable grounds. For since they stood in diametrical opposition one to another, and stirred up battles and wars against each other, and nothing better, each with jealous strife of words confuting their neighbours’ opinions, must not every one admit that our hesitation of these subjects [addressed by the Greek writers] has been reasonable and safe?⁴⁶

Eusebius continues that these renowned writers of the Greco-Roman tradition have discredited their works themselves: “Since... we have now exhibited the dissension and fighting of these sages among themselves, and since the wholly superfluous, and unintelligible, and to us utterly unnecessary study and learning of all the other subjects which the tribes of philosophers still take pride, have been refuted not by our demonstrations but their own.”⁴⁷ Eusebius drives home the inferiority of these historians, not only by demonstrating that there are manifest contradictions between their writers like Plutarch, Thucydides and all the rest, but by accusing the Greeks of being unoriginal in thought.⁴⁸ He boldly asserts that the Greco-Roman tradition of these

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., XV.XXXII, 903.

⁴⁷ Ibid., XV.LXII.d, 919.

⁴⁸ In *Preparation* Eusebius mentions Plutarch many dozens of times and Thucydides twice. He is not positive regarding Plutarch or Thucydides as well as other Greco-Roman writers but, each time, his opinion

writers gives evidence that “possibly the doctrine of the Hebrews have been plagiarised by them” and even more, that these writers “have stolen the other branches of learning from Egyptians and Chaldees and the rest of the barbarous nations, but even to the present day are detected in robbing one another of the honors gained in their own writings.”⁴⁹

The power and genius of Eusebius’ argument is also found in tracing the earlier writers of Christian history, demonstrating that he does not stand alone in such opinions regarding Greco-Roman historiography, for he quotes other church fathers before him to support this point as not original to him but as maintained previously by the early church. He cites Clement in the following terms, “To this Clement subjoined countless instances, and convicted by the Greeks of having been plagiarists by indisputable proofs.”⁵⁰ For Eusebius and other significant church fathers whom he cites, like Clement of Alexandria, the Greco-Roman historiographical tradition lacks originality, since the Greeks merely echoed others “by going out among the Barbarians, collected the other branches of learning, geometry, arithmetic, music, astronomy, medicine, and the very first elements of grammar, and numberless other artistic and profitable studies.”⁵¹ Such a negative attitude is not just Eusebius’ opinion, for he comments that “Our Clement then, in his sixth *Miscellany*, has arranged the proof of this point at full length: so take and read me his words first.”⁵² He then quotes Clement (ca. AD 150–215) several times to prove his point, showing how far reaching into church history the rejection of these writers went. Prominently, Eusebius indicates the influence of Clement’s thought in the early church by citing his *Miscellanies*, or *Stromata* (Στρωματεῖς), which are among the largest and most valuable remains of Christian antiquity:

Come, and let us adduce the Greeks as witnesses against themselves to the theft. For, inasmuch as they pilfer from one another, they establish the fact that they are thieves; and although against their will, they are detected, clandestinely appropriating to those of their own race the truth which belongs to us. For if they do not keep their hands from each other, they will hardly do it from our authors. I shall say nothing of philosophic dogmas, since the very persons who are the authors of the divisions into sects, confess in writing, so as not to be convicted of ingratitude, that they have received from Socrates the most important of their dogmas. But after availing myself of a few testimonies of men most talked of, and of repute among the Greeks, and exposing their plagiarizing style, and selecting them from various periods that belong to that early period.⁵³

Eusebius summarizes Clement’s thoughts to demonstrate that long ago Greek writers, such as Thucydides, Plutarch, and the like, were demonstrated to have stolen

is consistently negative. His goal is to defend Christianity, as well as the Hebrew tradition, from Greco-Roman attacks that have been conducted, especially by Porphyry, who lauded the Greco-Roman tradition.

⁴⁹ Ibid., X.I.b–c, 491.

⁵⁰ Ibid., X.II, 494. cf. Clement, *Miscellanies*, vi.

⁵¹ Ibid., X.I.d, 490.

⁵² Ibid., X.I.d, 491; cf. Clement, *Miscellanies*, VI.c.2, §4., 491.

⁵³ Clement, *Miscellanies* VI.II, 481.

from each other and from other sources.⁵⁴ Clement labels their historiographical records as “composing falsehoods,”⁵⁵ noting that “not only have they been detected pirating and paraphrasing thoughts and expressions, as will be shown; but they will also be convicted of the possession of what is entirely stolen. For stealing entirely what is the production of others, they have published it as their own.”⁵⁶

Such comments by the nascent fathers, like Clement and catalogued carefully by Eusebius, hardly give any confidence to the current critical biblical scholarship hypothesis of viewing the Gospels as products of Greco-Roman historiography. Eusebius denigrates them in the following terms:

For by copying different sciences from different nations, they got geometry from the Egyptians, and astrology from the Chaldeans, and other things again from other countries; but nothing among any other nations like the benefit some of them found from the Hebrews.

But thus much at present it indicates to the readers [of Eusebius’ work], that the ancient Greeks were destitute not only of true theology, but also the sciences which are profitable to philosophy; and not of these only, but also of the common habits of civil life.”⁵⁷

In Book X, Eusebius issues a stinging rebuke of the Greco-Roman traditions:

But I think that out of numberless examples those which have been mentioned are sufficient to show what was the character of the Greek writers, and that they did not spare even the exposure one of another. Yet in farther preparation for showing the benefit which has overflowed to the Greeks from the Hebrew Scriptures, I think it will be right and necessary for me to prove generally that all the celebrated learning and philosophy of the Greeks, both their elementary studies, and their grand system of logical science, have been collected by them from Barbarians, so that none of them may any longer lay blame upon us, because forsooth we have preferred the religion and philosophy of the Barbarians to their grand doctrines.⁵⁸

Eusebius Argues that the Gospels and Christian Tradition

⁵⁴ Eusebius notes, “Then he [Clement] successively compares passages of Orpheus, Heraclitus, Plato, Pythagoras, Herodotus, Theopompus, Thucydides, Demosthenes, Aeschines, Lysias, Isocrates, and ten thousand others, of whose sayings it is superfluous for me [i.e. Eusebius] to make a catalogue, as the author’s [Clement’s] work is ready at hand.” In *Preparation* X.II. c–d (492); cp. Clement *Miscellanies* VI.II (*ANF*, 482), where Thucydides is mentioned by Clement as an example of a literary thief. Eusebius then cites many more similar phrases, like those that Clement used for the Greco-Roman writers, such as when Clement related that “they pilfer from one another, they establish the fact that they are thieves; and although against their will, they are detected, clandestinely appropriating to those of their own race the truth which belongs to us. For if they do not keep their hands from each other, they will hardly do it from our authors.” Clement, *Miscellanies*, VI.II (*ANF*, 481).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, VI.III, 486.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, VI.II.

⁵⁷ Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* X.IV, 505.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, X.III., 499.

Find Base in the Hebrew Old Testament Tradition

Eusebius also firmly stresses that Christians have role-modeled the Hebrew traditions of the Old Testament in the formulation of the Gospel as well as Christian writing in the Gospels, by emphasizing that “we [Christians] have preferred the philosophy of the Hebrews to that of the Greeks.”⁵⁹ In Chapter XIII of *Preparation of the Gospel*, he drew a more favorable view of Plato than others, asserting that at points, “the philosophy of Plato contains as translation as it were, of Moses and the sacred writings of the Hebrews into the Greek language.... Why then, he [the reader of Eusebius’ work] might say, if Moses and Plato have agreed so well in their philosophy, are we to follow the doctrines of Plato but of Moses?”⁶⁰ He goes on to explain a sharp distinction in Book XIII, that:

The oracles of the Hebrews containing prophecies and responses of a divine power are beyond that of man, and claiming God as their author, and confirming their promise of the prediction of things to come, and by the results corresponding to the prophecies, are said to be free from all erroneous thought.... But not such are the words of Plato, nor yet of any other of the wise among men, who with the eyes of mortal thought and with feeble guesses and comparisons... so that one can find in them no learning free from error.⁶¹

Eusebius concludes that even though Plato might follow Moses and the Hebrew tradition (“enactments of Moses”) in his viewpoint at times, “we most gladly welcome all that is noble and excellent in him... we have not chosen to follow Plato in philosophy.”⁶² Here his reasoning is consistent in affirming that while a little value might be in some of these writers like Plato, only the Scripture is inspired by God and without error. He says of Plato in comparison with Scripture, that “not such are the words of Plato, nor yet of any other of the wise among men, who with eyes of mortal thought and with feeble guesses and comparisons, as in a dream, and not awake, attained to a notion of the nature of all things, but superadded to the truth of nature a large admixture of falsehood, so that one can find in them no learning free from error.”⁶³

Eusebius’ method is strategic—he uses the very words of the pagan Greco-Roman tradition of writers to show their utter inconsistency between them. For Eusebius and the early church, both the Old and the New Testament are the only documents that can claim to be free from error. The strategic point of *Preparation for the Gospel* exhibits the early church’s early, widespread rejection of Greco-Roman tradition in favor of that of the Old Testament literature as a pattern for the New Testament literature. Eusebius sums up his final chapter of *Preparation* with these concluding words:

⁵⁹ Ibid., X.1.b, 489.

⁶⁰ Ibid., XIII.I.a, 693.

⁶¹ Ibid., XIII.XIV c–d, 745.

⁶² Ibid., XIII.XXI.d, 771.

⁶³ Ibid., XIII.IV, 745.

[W]e have now exhibited the dissension and fighting of these sages among themselves, and since the wholly superfluous, and unintelligible, and to us utterly unnecessary study and learning of all the other subjects in which the tribes of philosophers still taken pride, we have refuted not by our own demonstrations but by their own; may more, we since we have also plainly set forth the reason why we have rejected their doctrines and preferred the Hebrew oracles.⁶⁴

For Eusebius, and the great line of Christian and Hebrew writers that he has cited, neither Plutarch or Thucydides, nor anyone else for that matter, comes anywhere near setting the standard for history or accuracy. Such deprecation solidly refutes the idea that the Gospels would ever be compared to the historiography of such writers.

In sum, we find several strategic thoughts from Eusebius in *Preparation*. First, Eusebius would not have linked the Gospels with ancient historiography, especially Thucydides or Plutarch. Modern evangelical critical scholars have ignored this great church historian's work that cites the ancient Christian rejection of these writers as presenting anything of substance. Second, Eusebius bases the pattern for the Christian message and Gospels in the Hebrew historiography. Indeed, to Eusebius, these ancient writers are guilty of plagiarizing Moses! Third, the concept of the Gospels as Greco-Roman biography are shown to be a novel idea of the twentieth and twenty-first century imposed upon the material rather than being supported in the early nascent church and especially by the church's first great historian.

The Evidence from Eusebius' *The Proof of the Gospel*

Another volume dedicated to refuting Porphyry's assault against Christianity is Eusebius' *The Proof of the Gospel* in twenty books (ca. AD 314–318).⁶⁵ The purpose of this work was to offer a thorough defense of the Christian adoption and modification of the Jewish tradition.⁶⁶ J. B. Lightfoot termed this work as probably the most important apologetic work of the early church.⁶⁷ Both *Preparation for the Gospel* and *Proof of the Gospel* were separate, but also complementary works in purpose. *Preparation for the Gospel* concluded with Eusebius' comment at the end that "it remains... to make answer to those of the circumcision who find fault with us, make use of their books, which, as they would say, do not belong to us at all."⁶⁸

The Proof of the Gospel is Eusebius' full expression of this next purpose that he would defend Christianity as the true completion of the Old Testament prophetic promise, as well as the religion of the Old Testament patriarchs, who viewed the Messiah as fulfilled in Jesus. The purpose of its pages "was to give an answer to all reasonable questions both from Jewish or Greek inquirers about Christianity, and its relationship to

⁶⁴ Ibid., XV.LXII, 919.

⁶⁵ W. J. Ferrar, "Introduction," in Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. W. J. Ferrar (1920; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), I:xiii.

⁶⁶ Dungan, *Constantine's Bible*, 59.

⁶⁷ J. B. Lightfoot, "Eusebius," in *A Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature to the End of the Sixth Century A.D., with an Account of the Principal Sects and Heresies*, 2 vols., ed. Henry Wace (1880 repr., Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2000), 2:331.

⁶⁸ Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, XV.LXII.d, 919.

other Christians.”⁶⁹ While *Preparation for the Gospel* was to be a general guide of instruction, *The Proof of the Gospel*’s purpose was to go into much greater depth to strengthen especially the convictions of those who had already accepted Christianity to “give a completer enlightenment for those who are already members of the Church of Christ.”⁷⁰ Ferrar gives an excellent summation of *Proof of the Gospel*’s occasion for writing by Eusebius:

To sum up, it was the cessation of the persecution, the ground impression made on the educated and the uneducated alike by the imperial change of front, the proud sense within the Church itself its patience had triumphed, combined with the presence of the opposing criticism of the cultured [e.g., Porphyry], which may be said to have been the occasion for the great literary effort.⁷¹

Eusebius Argues that Canonical Gospels Are Anchored to the Old Testament Writings

Eusebius takes care to show that the Gospels based their understanding of Jesus Christ from the prophetic portions of the Old Testament to which the Gospels drew their source material—Gospel content is anchored to the Old Testament writings.⁷² While the following quote is lengthy it is nonetheless important to show that the content of the Gospels were the actual historic outworking of Hebrew prophecy in the Old Testament:

It is possible for you, if you care to take the trouble, to see with your eyes, comprehended in the prophetic writings, all the wonderful miracles of our Saviour Jesus Christ Himself, that are witnessed to *by the heavenly Gospels* and to hear His divine and perfect teaching about true holiness. How it must move our wonder, when they unmistakably proclaim the new ideal of religion preached by Him to all men, the call of His disciples, and the teaching of the new Covenant. Yes, and in addition to all this they foretell the Jews’ disbelief in Him, and disputing, the plots of the rulers, the envy of the Scribes, the treachery of one of His disciples, the schemes of enemies, the accusations of false witnesses, the condemnations of His judges, the shameful violence, unspeakable scourging, ill-omened abuse, and, crowning all, the death of shame. They portray Christ’s wonderful silence, His gentleness and fortitude, and the unimaginable depths of His forbearance and forgiveness.

The most ancient Hebrew oracles present all these things definitely about One Who would come in the last times, and Who would undergo such sufferings among men, and they clearly tell the source of their foreknowledge. They bear

⁶⁹ Ferrar, “Introduction,” *The Proof of the Gospel*, I:ix. While the *Proof of the Gospel* had originally twenty chapters or books, only the first ten of it survived in their complete form. Gifford characterizes both works as “the most systematic and comprehensive of the many apologetic works of Christianity.” Gifford, “Preface,” *Preparation of the Gospel*, 5.

⁷⁰ Ferrar, “Introduction,” *The Proof of the Gospel*, x.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁷² Eusebius draws his proof for the Gospel in the following terms, “It seems now time to say what I consider to be desirable at present to draw from the prophetic writings for the proof of the Gospel.” Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel* I.I, 2.

witness to the Resurrection from the dead of the Being Whom they revealed, His appearance to His disciples, His gift of the Holy Spirit to them. His return to heaven, His establishment as King on His Father's throne and His glorious second Advent yet to be at the consummation of the age. In addition to all this you can hear the wailings and lamentations of each of tin• prophets, wailing and lamenting characteristically over the calamities which will overtake the Jewish people because of their impiety to Him Who had been foretold. How their kingdom, that had continued from time days of a remote ancestry to their own, would be Utterly destroyed after their sin against Christ; how their fathers' Laws would be abrogated, they themselves deprived of their ancient worship, robbed of the independence of their forefathers, and made slaves of their enemies instead of free men; how their royal metropolis would be burned with fire, their venerable holy altar undergo the flames and extreme desolation, their city be inhabited no longer by its old possessors but by races of other stock, while they would be dispersed among the Gentiles through the whole world, with never a hope of any cessation of evil, or breathing-space from troubles. And it is plain even to the blind, that what they saw and foretold is fulfilled in actual facts from the very day the Jews laid godless hands on Christ, and drew down on themselves the beginning of the train of sorrows.⁷³

For Eusebius, the Old Testament's outworking of proof from Old Testament prophecy is found in the canonical Gospels' record of Jesus' life, making the Old Testament the basis for the Gospels. Books One and Two of *The Proof of the Gospel* are the strategic "prolegomena" that anchor the Christian religion to the Jewish Scriptures with Christianity as the real fulfilment of the Old Testament.⁷⁴ Books 1 and 2 clarify that while Christians use the Old Testament to form their understanding of the life and mission of Jesus, they did not accept the Jewish Old Covenant religion of Moses.⁷⁵ Eusebius reminds his readers:

I have already laid down in my Preparation [of the Gospel] that Christianity is neither a form of Hellenism, nor of Judaism, but that it is a religion with its own characteristic stamp and that this is not anything novel or original, but something of the greatest antiquity, something natural and family to the godly men before the times of Moses.⁷⁶

Therefore, while Christianity is based in the Jewish Scriptures, its belief in Christ goes beyond any form of Jewish religion found in Judaism. Eusebius took great pain to show how the Gospel content was foretold in Hebrew Scripture, citing numerous Old Testament passages as predicting Jesus' life and ministry. He goes on to comment regarding Books 1–2, "I have shown the nature of our Saviour's teaching, and given the reason of our [Christianity's] regard for the oracles of the Jews, while we reject their rule of life. I have made it clear that their prophetic writings in their foresight of the

⁷³ Ibid., I.I.4, 3–4. Italics added.

⁷⁴ See comment by Ferrar, in Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, III:101n1.

⁷⁵ Ibid., xiii.

⁷⁶ Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, I.2, 7.

future recorded our own calling through Christ, so that we make use of them not as books alien to us, but as our own property.”⁷⁷

Book III makes a firm stance for the authenticity of the Gospel material, focusing especially Jesus’ miraculous works. He reviews, “the number and character or the marvelous works He [Jesus] performed while living among men; how He cleansed by His divine power those leprous in body, how He drove demons out of men by His word of command, and how again He cured ungrudgingly those who were sick, and laboring under all kinds of infirmity.”⁷⁸ He directly references Gospel accounts from Matthew 4:10, Mark 2:11, John 5:8, and he refers to the feeding of the five thousand, as well as to details of Jesus’ death and physical resurrection appearances.⁷⁹

For Eusebius, the relationship of the disciples as Jesus’ followers reveals “the root of their earnestness” in what they wrote.⁸⁰ He defends the Gospel writers as “[Jesus’] friends [who] bore witness” of the events they recorded, calling the authors of the Gospels “disciples” who had been Jesus “pupils.”⁸¹ He refers to Matthew 10 and Jesus’ commission of the disciples who taught others what Jesus had taught them.⁸² He calls the Gospel writers “masters in such instruction” of their “Master’s work,” who never would have “invented their account.”⁸³ He asks, “How is it possible to think that they were all in agreement to lie.”⁸⁴ He argues that the suffering of the disciples for their preaching of Jesus’ words (“undergo at the hands of their fellow-countrymen every insult and every form of punishment on account of their witness they delivered about Him”) refutes any accusation that they were deceivers.⁸⁵ He recounts the suffering witnessed also in Acts 5:29, where Peter affirms obedience to God rather than men, along with Stephen’s stoning in Acts 7, John’s brother James’ death in Acts 12, all as firm proof of the truth of the Gospel message.⁸⁶

Strategically, Eusebius distances the disciples from the learning of their time, describing them as “unable to speak or understand any other language but their own.”⁸⁷ Hardly a characterization that one would use if Eusebius believed that such disciples were given to mimic or imitate Greco-Roman methodology of biography! He affirms regarding the Gospels:

What a remarkable thing it is that they all agreed in every point of *their account of the acts of Jesus*. For if it is true that in all matters of dispute, either in legal tribunals or in ordinary disagreements, the agreement is decisive (in the

⁷⁷ Ibid., III, 101.

⁷⁸ Ibid., III.4, 124.

⁷⁹ Ibid. These Scriptural references are mentioned in Ibid., 124–62.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 127.

⁸¹ Ibid. III.V., 126.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 129.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 134.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

mouth of two or three witnesses every word is established [Deut 14:15]) surely the truth must be established in their case, there being twelve apostles and seventy disciples, and a large number apart from them, who all shewed an extraordinary agreement, and gave witness to the deeds of Jesus, not without labour, and by bearing torture, all kinds of outrage and death, and were in all things borne witness to by God, Who even now empowers the Word they preached, and will do so for ever.⁸⁸

Furthermore, Eusebius affirmed the traditional view of the authorship of the Gospels passed down by the earliest nascent church. Eusebius characterizes the Gospel of Matthew as “the Gospel written by him [the Apostle Matthew].⁸⁹ He then quotes the Greek Matthew 9:9 of Matthew’s calling at the tax booth.⁹⁰ Likewise, he affirms Luke’s authorship of the Gospel that bears his name, quoting from the Prologue of Luke 1:2 that Luke “honored Matthew, according to what they delivered, who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word.”⁹¹ He notes that John wrote the Johannine Epistles that bear his name as well as being the author of the Gospel of John, stating that “in the Gospel, though he declares himself as the one whom Jesus loved, he does not reveal himself by name.”⁹² Regarding Mark, he notes that Peter’s words are behind Mark’s Gospel: “Neither did Peter permit himself to write a Gospel through his excessive reverence. Mark, being his friend and companion, is said to have recorded the accounts of Peter about the Acts of Jesus.”⁹³ Eusebius even notes that the Gospel of Mark’s account of Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi was abbreviated by the fact that “Peter did not think it right to bring forward his own testimony what was said to him and concerning him by Jesus” in Mark 8:27–30 as compared to Matthew 16:15–19 where Jesus refers to Peter as the rock and gives him high praise.⁹⁴

In Books IV to X, Eusebius continues a thorough discussion of the fact that the account of Jesus in the Gospels was anchored to the Old Testament prophetic portions. His constant theme continues, that the Gospel, as evidenced in the New Testament canon, has its source in the prophecy and fulfillment pattern of the Scriptures. He quotes a numerous multitude of Old Testament prophetic portions, e.g., the Pentateuch, the Psalms (esp. Pss 2 and 110), as well as major prophetic books of the Old Testament to show how the New Testament revelation anchored to the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah.

In sum, Books IV–V anchors the deity of Jesus as the Son and Logos to the Old Testament Scriptures; Books VI–X show Jesus’ incarnation as fulfillment of Old Testament predictions; Book X specifically deals with the betrayal and passion of Jesus as being anchored to the Old Testament. He closes Book X when he quotes John 5:39 and urges his reader to examine the Old Testament further, to “Search the Scriptures”

⁸⁸ Eusebius *Demonstration*, III.V, 134–35. Italics added.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

and “plunge his [the reader’s] mind in each word of the Psalms and hunt for the exact sense of the truth expressed.”⁹⁵ The clear impression built from Books I–X is that the Old Testament is the complete foundation for what is contained in the Gospels in the pattern of prediction and fulfillment, with the consistent presentation of what the Old Testament predicted and how the New Testament showed its fulfillment, especially in the Gospels. Eusebius’ treatment is very thorough and exhaustive in demonstration of this pattern.

Conclusion as to Eusebius’ *Preparation for the Gospel and The Proof of the Gospel*

Modern New Testament evangelical critical scholarship has a tendency to ignore the testimony of the early church regarding the nature of the Gospels. Such tendency is perhaps due to the influence of the Enlightenment on today’s scholarship in its “prejudice against prejudice.”⁹⁶ Since most New Testament scholarship, both liberal-critical and evangelical-critical, bases their approach from historical critical ideology spawned by the Enlightenment, one can naturally expect that they ignore, or perhaps are unaware of prime evidence against novel theories like Greco-Roman biography. Peter Gay describes the main actors in the Enlightenment as follows: “Theirs was a paganism directed against their Christian inheritance and dependent upon the paganism of classical antiquity, but it was also a *modern* paganism, emancipated from classical thought as much as from Christian dogma.”⁹⁷ This hidden prejudice against prejudice bound to Enlightenment-influenced scholarship causes great error in understanding the nature of the Gospels as eyewitness accounts from men who experienced Jesus’ ministry.

From the first great church historian, Eusebius, emerge two fundamental truths: First, in *Preparation for the Gospel*, Eusebius would never have identified the Gospel historiography with the Greco-Roman tradition that he despised. Second, from *The Proof of the Gospel*, the real foundation to the Gospel accounts was that of promise and fulfillment from the Old Testament Scriptures. The Gospels evidenced in their content how the Old Testament predictions were the anchor and fulfillment of New Testament truths. One must now issue a call for evangelical-critical scholarship to abandon speculation of historical criticism and once again read, study, and understand the ancient Church’s witness to the Gospels.

Eusebius’ value is that of early acute awareness of what the ancient nascent church eldership testified about the New Testament canon. His testimony should not, and cannot be, ignored since he had a very thorough understanding of church history in the early first three centuries of the church. Eusebius’ works provide overwhelming proof that any equating of the Gospels to Greco-Roman biography or historiography is merely a scholarly fad and invention of New Testament critical scholarship, both liberal and evangelical.

⁹⁵ Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, X.8, 236.

⁹⁶ See F. David Farnell, “The Theological and Philosophical Bent of Historical Criticism,” in *The Jesus Crisis*, ed. Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, 85–131 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998).

⁹⁷ See Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), xi.

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