

The Protevangelium of James as an Alleged Parallel to Creative Historiography in the Synoptic Birth Narratives

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This article contrasts the compositional techniques used in the Synoptic birth narratives with those used by the author of a work which is almost universally recognized as midrashic, the Protevangelium of James. While "James" created his "history" from OT narratives, he was apparently unaware of the many OT dependencies in the Synoptic Gospels asserted by midrash critics. Unlike the Synoptic writers, the author of the Protevangelium of James created some of his narrative by retrojecting words and events from the later ministry of Christ into his account of Jesus' birth. These disparate compositional techniques suggest that the Synoptic Gospels and the midrashic Protevangelium of James belong to different literary genres.

Key Words: midrash, historiography, Gospels, genre, Protevangelium of James

Recently the importance of the *Protevangelium of James* for NT studies heightened as scholars classified it as a proven example of Christian midrash. H. J. Smid regarded the *Protevangelium of James* as "exégèse midrashique."¹ R. J. Bauckham stated: "It [*Protevangelium of James*] has been called midrashic (according to the loose use of that term in some NT scholarship . . .) because of its creative use of OT texts in developing the narrative."² Raymond Brown in his massive commentary on the Synoptic birth narratives classified the *Protevangelium of James* as distinctively Christian midrash.³ As Bauckham's parenthetical remarks indicate, scholars who describe the *Protevangelium of James*

1. H. J. Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965) 8.

2. R. J. Bauckham, "Gospels (Apocryphal)," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospel* (ed. J. B. Green and S. McKnight; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992) 290.

3. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 559.

as midrash do not intend midrash to be understood merely in the sense of an exegetical text. Rather midrash is intended to signify texts that use narrative themes from the OT in the composition of creative historiography that invents stories and presents them as history.

Because of the description of the *Protevangelium of James* as Christian midrash, the *Protevangelium of James* has been used to argue that creative historiography was known and accepted by the early Christian church.⁴ This makes the assessment of the Matthean and Lucan birth narratives as creative historiography much more plausible.⁵ Hence a detailed comparison of the literary tendencies of the *Protevangelium of James* with those of the Synoptic birth narratives is needed.

Two important methods of composition are apparent in the birth narrative of James that can be contrasted with the Synoptic birth narratives: (1) the narrative was composed through imaginative use of the OT account of a supernatural birth; and (2) material from the canonical Gospels concerning the adult life of Christ was adapted and arranged in order to supply needed details in the birth narrative.

CREATIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY WITH STRONG OLD TESTAMENT DEPENDENCIES

The use of the OT as a source for the birth narrative in the *Protevangelium of James* can be demonstrated by comparing James's narrative of Mary's birth with the account of the birth and childhood of Samuel. As James described the birth of Mary, he used seven different verbal and thematic allusions to Samuel's birth. James gave the name Anna (same as Hannah) to the mother of Mary, just as the mother of Samuel was named Hannah. In *Prot. Jas.* 2:3, Anna (the future mother of Mary) was told by her handmaid Euthine, "The Lord God has shut up your womb," just as the writer of 1 Sam 1:6 said that the Lord had shut Hannah's womb.

<p>1 Sam 1:5-6 καὶ κύριος ἀπέκλεισεν τὰ περὶ τὴν μήτραν αὐτῆς . . . ὅτι συνέκλεισεν κύριος τὰ περὶ τὴν μήτραν αὐτῆς τοῦ μὴ δοῦναι αὐτῇ παιδίον.</p>	<p><i>Prot. Jas.</i> 2:3 καθότι κύριος ἀπέκλεισε τὴν μήτραν σου</p>
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4. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 559-62.

5. I have argued elsewhere that midrash in the sense of creative historiography is a misnomer. See my upcoming works, "Midrash as Creative Historiography: The Portrait of a Misnomer," *JETS* (1996) 457-64; and *Midrash Criticism: Introduction and Appraisal* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1998). However, throughout this article I will adopt this loose usage of the term for the sake of simplicity.

The mother of Mary promised that if she could bear a child she would "bring it as a gift to the Lord" to serve him "all the days of its life." Hannah likewise made a vow that if the Lord gave her a child she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life.⁶ Like Hannah, Anna convinced her husband to wait an extra year before taking the child to the Temple.⁷ Like Samuel, Mary was three years old when presented to the priests in the Temple.⁸ Like Samuel, Mary was raised in the Holy of Holies.⁹

While these parallels do not necessitate a dependency upon the OT Samuel narrative, they do at least suggest such a dependency. First, some of the parallels are difficult to explain apart from such a dependency. Mary could not have been raised in the Holy of Holies as the *Protevangelium of James* asserts, since doing so was clearly forbidden by OT law and first-century Jewish legislation.¹⁰ Second, unlike the dependencies upon the OT suspected by midrash critics for the Synoptic birth narratives, the use of the OT narrative motif in the *Protevangelium of James* is consistent. Anna is not portrayed as Hannah, then Rebecca, then Jochebed, but consistently as Hannah.

The author of the *Protevangelium of James* seems to have used the method of composition that has been called midrash. He created Mary's mother from the OT figure Hannah. He made Mary's birth parallel the birth and childhood of Samuel. Midrash critics have suggested that Matthew similarly created the character Joseph from his OT namesake, while Luke created Simeon, Zechariah, and Anna from OT passages. They have argued that Zechariah and Elizabeth as well as Joseph and Mary were patterned after Elkanah and Hannah. John the Baptist was patterned after Samson. Jesus was patterned after Moses. Material was created by the Gospel writer and cast in a form that called attention to parallels between the NT characters and their OT counterparts in a way that was obvious to the first-century reader.

However, the author of the *Protevangelium of James* was familiar with midrash as a means of literary composition and used it in the

6. 1 Sam 1:11; 2:11; 1:28; and *Prot. Jas.* 4:1.

7. 1 Sam 1:21-22 and *Prot. Jas.* 7:1.

8. *Prot. Jas.* 7:2. 1 Samuel does not explicitly say that Samuel was three years old. 1 Samuel says only that Samuel had been weaned. This age was probably suggested to James since the bull that was presented in the temple along with Samuel was three years old (1 Sam 1:24). The mother and father of Mary waited three years so that "the child may no more long after her father and mother," another parallel to the Samuel narrative.

9. 1 Sam 3:3 and *Prot. Jas.* 13:3.

10. Oscar Cullmann, "Infancy Gospels," *The New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 1.372.

narrative of Mary's birth. If such midrashic forms of composition did appear in the Synoptics, the author of the *Protevangelium of James* should have easily spotted them. Furthermore, if he had found midrash based upon OT characters already present in Matthew or Luke based upon OT characters, then one would expect him to add details to the birth narrative of Jesus by expanding already existing parallels between the OT and NT characters. Michael Goulder, probably the most prolific and influential midrash critic, argued that two early church fathers exhibited their awareness of Matthew and Luke's midrashic dependency on the OT by expanding their midrashic themes. He argued that Ignatius's *Ephesians* 19 recognized Matthew's star of Bethlehem as dependent upon Gen 37:9 and expanded this motif. Justin's identification of the magi with Arabia in his *Dialogue with Trypho* 78 demonstrated his awareness that Matthew had depended on Isa 60:6 and Ps 72:10, 15.¹¹ Elsewhere I have challenged Goulder's theory that Justin and Ignatius expanded Matthew's midrashic dependencies.¹² However, I concur with Goulder's premise. If later Christian midrashists who desired to embellish the Synoptic birth narratives were aware of Matthew and Luke's midrashic dependencies, they likely would have added to the narrative by expanding their midrashic themes. The author of the *Protevangelium of James* did not do this. Instead, he expanded the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth from his own imagination, evolving tradition, or possibly other OT passages.¹³ Apparently this experienced second-century midrashist did not suspect Matthew or Luke of having used midrash themselves.

The only character from the Matthean and Lucan narratives to whom James apparently applied midrash, in a pattern consistent with what midrash critics suggest for the evangelists, is Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. James expanded the narrative by looking to a Zechariah from the OT and by mingling that account with the NT character. *Protevangelium of James* 24 said that Zechariah the high priest was slain in the Temple by Herod for refusing to reveal the location of John. The similarities between this account and 2 Chr 24:20-22 are strong. Possibly James confused that Zechariah with the one

11. Michael D. Goulder and M. L. Sanderson, "St. Luke's Genesis," *JTS* 8 (1957) 25-27.

12. Quarles, "An Analysis of Midrash Criticism as Applied to the Synoptic Birth Narratives" (Ph.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994) 109-13.

13. Cullmann suggested three possible parallels between the OT and the *Protevangelium of James* in the section on Jesus' birth. These were Gen 25:23 and *Prot. Jas.* 17:2; Isa 9:2 and *Prot. Jas.* 19:2; and 2 Chr 24:20-22 and *Protevangelium of James* 23-24. Only the final parallel is definite. The other two are based merely on the shared occurrences of the words "two peoples" and "great light," respectively. See Cullmann, "Infancy Gospels," 1.383-84, 387-88.

mentioned in Matt 23:35. Either passage could be the source that he used.

James may have suspected Luke of creating Zechariah in mid-rashic manner from 2 Chronicles or the prophecies of Zechariah. However, conclusive evidence for such a theory is lacking. M. D. Goulder and M. L. Sanderson attempted to establish the theory of Lucan dependency upon 2 Chronicles by showing OT allusions to exist in Zechariah's occupation as a priest (Luke 1:5; 2 Chr 24:20), his service in the Temple (Luke 1:8; 2 Chr 24:21), the Spirit of the Lord causing both Zechariahs to prophesy (Luke 1:67; 2 Chr 24:20), and the use of ἀνατολή by both Zechariahs (Luke 1:78; Zech 3:9; 4:12).¹⁴

Actually, these evidences are not as convincing as they first appear to be. Luke's use of ἀνατολή does not come from Zechariah, where the word meant "root." Luke's Zechariah spoke of an ἀνατολή that comes from Heaven and "shines on those living in darkness." It is terribly difficult to trace such a description back to Zechariah's "root." Luke's use of the term seems to have been influenced by Mal 4:2 and speaks of the rising of the "Sun of righteousness." This is supported by both lexical and contextual evidence.¹⁵

Goulder and Sanderson's insistence on a triple parallel between narratives describing the OT Zechariah and the Lucan Zechariah is also tenuous. If Zechariah was truly a priest, serving in the Temple was a normal duty. Thus the first and second parallels must be reduced to one actual parallel. The third parallel should be discredited as well. The LXX translation of 2 Chr 24:20 is Καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐνέδυσσε τὸν Ἀζαρίαν . . . καὶ εἶπε. Luke wrote, Καὶ Ζαχαρίας ὁ πατὴρ ἐπλήσθη πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ ἐπροφήτευσεν λέγων. Despite some general parallel in thought and structure, the only true verbal parallel is between πνεῦμα and πνεύματος. This is hardly convincing evidence of Lucan midrash based upon 2 Chronicles 24. It is doubtful that the author of the *Protevangelium of James* had the LXX before him in his composition, since all his allusions to the LXX are rather loose renditions. However, Luke was clearly familiar with the LXX. Had he intended to point out a parallelism, one would expect his selection of vocabulary to parallel more closely that of his source.

The only real parallel between the Lucan Zechariah and the Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 20 is that the Lucan Zechariah is a priest, and the Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 20 is the son of the high priest. This by no means affirms a Lucan dependence upon 2 Chronicles 20, since

14. Goulder and Sanderson, "St. Luke's Genesis," 16-17.

15. BAGD, s.v. "ἀνατολή." This resource shows that the Lucan usage of this word should be translated "rising." This meaning fits well with the etymology of the word and is by far the most frequent meaning of the word in Scripture.

Zechariah was a common name for priests and Levites. Of the thirty men named Zechariah in the OT, fifteen were either priests or Levites.¹⁶ Thus James expanded the Lucan character Zechariah using midrashic methods, and this may betray his suspicion that Luke depended upon the OT Zechariah narratives to create the character. However, close examination of the parallels demonstrates he had no conclusive grounds for suspecting Luke of applying this compositional technique.

Raymond Brown has hesitantly suggested that James may have added camels, oxen, and donkeys to the birth scene by expanding Matthew and Luke's midrashic use of Isa 60:6 and Isa 1:3 respectively.¹⁷ This suggestion is very speculative. When Brown supposed that Matthew used Isa 60:6 to invent the gifts of the magi, he neglected to explain why Matthew added myrrh to Isaiah's gold and incense, thereby blurring the alleged midrashic connection to Isaiah. The message of Isa 1:3 fits poorly with Luke 2 since Luke's manger scene depicts joy over Christ's birth but Isaiah's verse describes Israel's rebellion against Yahweh. This difficulty in connecting Luke 2:7, 12, and 16 to Isa 1:3 forced Brown to argue awkwardly that Luke was announcing the repeal of the Isaiah passage. This difficulty should have led Brown to lay aside his speculation. When one incautiously accepts a single term shared by two passages as an indication of dependence, Gen 3:18 could as easily be the source of the manger motif as Isa 1:3.¹⁸

The *Protevangelium of James* provides an example of an early Christian who, though familiar enough with midrash to use its methods skillfully, seems to have been unaware of the plethora of alleged Lucan and Matthean midrashic dependencies on the OT. Even if (contrary to my own opinion) the *Protevangelium of James's* expansion of the character Zechariah betrayed his suspicion of Lucan use of midrash to create or embellish the Zechariah narrative, his apparent failure to recognize the many other alleged midrashic dependencies that midrash critics affirm (and that they assert would have been obvious to ancient readers familiar with the genre) suggests that he regarded the Synoptic birth narratives as essentially nonmidrashic.

ADAPTATIONS OF DETAILS FROM THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

The writer of the *Protevangelium of James* created some of the material within his birth narrative by adapting words and events from the

16. C. L. Feinberg, "Zechariah," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (ed. M. C. Tenney; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 5.1041-42.

17. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 559.

18. J. D. M. Derrett, "The Manger: Ritual Law and Soteriology," *Theology* 74 (1971) 566-71.

ministry of Jesus and retrojecting them into the birth narrative. Two striking examples of this are found in *Prot. Jas.* 19:3 and 24:3.

In 19:3, Salome (who may have been created from Mark 15:40 and 16:1) met the midwife who had witnessed the miraculous birth of Jesus. The midwife told Salome that she had witnessed a virgin birth. By this she meant that Jesus had not been born by normal vaginal birth but had miraculously appeared, leaving the mother's hymen intact. To this Salome responded: "As the *Lord my God* lives, *unless I put (forward) my finger* and test her condition, *I will not believe* that a virgin has brought forth [*italics mine*]." Oscar Cullman recognized that these words were dependent upon John 20:25.¹⁹ The italicized words offer a parallel to Thomas's statement, "Unless . . . I put my finger in the print of the nails . . . I will not believe."

The significant verbal parallels between the Greek texts of John 20:25 and *Prot. Jas.* 19:3 heighten the suspicion of dependency.

John 20:25	Prot. Jas. 19:3
Ἐὰν μὴ ἴδω ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτοῦ τὸν τύπον τῶν ἡλῶν καὶ βάλω τὸν δάκτυλόν μου εἰς τὸν τύπον τῶν ἡλῶν καὶ βάλω μου τὴν χεῖρα εἰς τὴν πλευράν αὐτοῦ, οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω.	ἐὰν μὴ βάλω τὸν δάκτυλόν μου καὶ ἐρευνήσω τὴν φύσιν αὐτῆς οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω.

While one must exercise extreme caution in utilizing parallels to suggest dependencies, the evidence for dependency in these parallels is stronger than the evidence often appealed to by critics who attempt to establish midrash in the Synoptic birth narratives.

First, the parallels are not merely thematic but are verbal. Second, the parallels are not merely lexical but are also grammatical. The exact grammatical forms from Thomas's statement were preserved in the words of Salome. Third, the orders of the verbal parallels in their own contexts are identical. Though words are omitted or added as necessary to fit the new context, the writer did preserve the word order of his source. The parallelism of vocabulary, grammar, and order seems to be more than mere coincidence.

In *Prot. Jas.* 24:3, the writer described the aftermath of the martyrdom of Zechariah, "And they heard and saw what had happened. And the panel-work of the ceiling of the temple wailed, and they *rent* their clothes *from the top to the bottom* [*italics mine*]." Cullman recognized that these words were dependent upon Matt 27:51. Matthew told how, in the aftermath of Jesus' crucifixion, the veil in the Temple was rent from top to bottom.

19. Cullman, "Infancy Gospels," 1.385.

Once again, the parallel is not only thematic but verbal as well.

<p>Matt 27:51 τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ ἐσχίσθη ἀπὸ ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω εἰς δύο.</p>	<p>Prot. Jas. 24:3 καὶ αὐτοὶ περιεσχίσσαντο ἀπὸ ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω.</p>
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The verbal parallelism here is not as extensive or as precise as in the previous example. However, the parallelism is strengthened by two considerations. First, while the verbs are not identical, the verbs in each sentence share the same root, σχίζω and περισχίζω. The verbs share the same tense, although the voice and number had to be altered to fit the context.

Second, the parallel is strengthened by the fact that this verb rather awkwardly describes the tearing of one's garments. In Matt 26:65 the verb used to describe the high priest's act of tearing his garments was διέρρηξεν. In Mark 14:63, the participial form of this same verb was used. The normal verb used in a description of the rending of garments in the LXX is ῥήγνυμι. Christian Maurer recognized the use of σχίζω in Isa 36:22 and 37:1, describing the rent garments of Hezekiah and his associates, as unusual.²⁰ His description is also appropriate for *Prot. Jas.* 24:3. Thus the author's retention of the σχίζω root, despite its infrequency in similar descriptions and the need for modification, points toward his dependence upon Matthew.

Third, the usage of the statement is awkward because of the absence of any reference to clothing. The Greek text literally reads "They tore themselves." The awkwardness of the reading eventually led some scribes to emend the text. The scribe of codex C inserted the words τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν into the text for clarification. The scribe behind codex F^a changed αὐτοὶ to αὐτὰ to produce the reading "They tore them" (neuter plural, referring obviously to clothes). Apparently the author of the *Protevangelium of James* composed this obscure sentence in a desire to accommodate his writing, as closely as possible, to the Matthean statement.

The suspected dependency of the sentence on Matt 27:51 is further confirmed by the puzzling phrase ἀπο ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω. While examples of rending one's clothes in grief abound in the OT, never is it said that they were torn from top to bottom.²¹ The custom was to tear a slit in the bottom of an item of apparel or to tear the top of the garments just enough to bare the chest. To tear garments that one was presently wearing from top to bottom was terribly difficult, if not impossible. This strengthens the suspicion that James retrojected

20. Christian Maurer, "σχίζω," *TDNT* 7.959-64.

21. See Gen 37:29, 44:13; 2 Sam 3:31; 2 Chr 34:27; Isa 36:22; 37:1; Joel 2:13; Ezra 9:3; Acts 14:14; Matt 26:65; Mark 14:63; *m. Mo^eed Qat.* 3:7; and *m. Sanh.* 7:5.

Matthew's account of the aftermath of Jesus' execution into his own account of the aftermath of Zechariah's execution.

If Matthew or Luke had imaginatively created elements of their birth narratives, traditions of the later ministry of Jesus easily could have provided materials for them as well. J. P. Charlier has argued that Matthew 1 and 2 did not give the reader family reminiscences but instead retrojected events from Jesus' adult ministry into the infancy narratives.²² Charlier especially pointed toward alleged parallels between Matthew 28 and the Matthean birth narratives. J. D. M. Derrett has argued that Luke retrojected narrative motifs from the resurrection back into his birth narrative. In particular, he claimed that Luke's manger was patterned after the rock tomb of Luke 23 and 24.²³ Nevertheless, the evidence is insufficient to prove that either Matthew or Luke adapted details concerning Jesus' adulthood experiences to satisfy curiosity about his birth, infancy, or childhood experiences.

Raymond Brown also asserted that the Synoptic birth narratives borrowed themes and specific details from Jesus' adult ministry. He claimed that the infancy narratives are a "mélange of items of history or verisimilitude . . . , of images drawn from the OT or Jewish tradition, of images anticipated from the Gospel account of the ministry—all woven together to dramatize the conception and birth of the Messiah who was God's Son."²⁴ In the passion narratives and baptismal accounts, a christological event was followed by a proclamation which was met by the mixed reaction of acceptance/homage or rejection/persecution. Both Matthew and Luke had transposed this sequence to the birth narratives. Matthew had also transposed particular details from the passion narrative back to the birth narrative. He pointed out such parallels as: (1) a secular ruler in Jerusalem with "all the chief priests and elders of the people" arraigns Jesus in Matt 27:1, and in 2:3-4 a king in Jerusalem consults "all the chief priests and scribes of the people" concerning Christ; (2) "all the people" accept responsibilities for Jesus' blood in 27:25, and in 2:3 "all Jerusalem" is startled by the Messiah; (3) only the passion and infancy narratives give Jesus the title "King of the Jews"; (4) in the passion narrative,

22. J. P. Charlier, "Du berceau au tombeau: Préface et postface de l'évangile de Matthieu," *Vie Spirituelle* 133 (1979) 8-25.

23. J. D. M. Derrett, "The Manger at Bethlehem: Light on St. Luke's Technique from Contemporary Jewish Religious Law," in *Studia Evangelica* (TU 112; Berlin: Akademie, 1973) 6.43-45. Of the twelve parallels Derrett adduced, only three were convincing. One of these three required acceptance of the biblically unsubstantiated tradition that Jesus was born in a cave.

24. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 561.

Jesus died and came back to life, while in the birth narrative Jesus went to a foreign country and then returned.²⁵

These parallels are so imprecise as to contribute little to the issue of literary dependency. Literary dependency may be confidently demonstrated only when a secondary document (or in this case a different unit within the same document) includes sustained parallels in theme, vocabulary, grammar, and word order. With the exception of the third suggested thematic parallel, Brown's paralleled statements are more different than alike. The most that can be argued from these parallels is that the linguistic expression of the birth narrative is consistent with that of the passion narrative in the first Gospel. These suggested parallels are unconvincing evidence of Matthew or Luke's retrojection of details from the passion narrative into the birth narrative.

The editors of the United Bible Society's Greek text and *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* carefully pointed out verbal and thematic parallels between Gospel passages and possible sources in the OT, other Gospel accounts, and other NT books. The only parallels that they discovered between the birth narratives and later descriptions of Jesus' ministry were Luke 1:17 and Matt 17:11-13; Luke 1:68 and Luke 7:16; Luke 2:14 and Luke 19:38.

The first parallel is thematic. It contains Zechariah's prophecy that John would have the spirit and power of Elijah and the fulfillment of that prophecy. Fulfillment of prophecy within the Gospel is quite different from the editorial retrojection of James.

The second parallel is verbal. Luke 1:68 includes the clause ἐπεσκέψατο καὶ ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ. Luke 7:16 includes the words Ἐπεσκέψατο ὁ θεὸς τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ. This is not a retrojection but a repeated allusion to Ps 111:9, which occurs again in Luke 19:44.

The third parallel is also verbal. Luke 2:14 says, Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας. Luke 19:38 says, Εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου· ἐν οὐρανῷ εἰρήνη καὶ δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις. "Peace" was a common word. The difference between peace "on earth" and peace "in heaven" suggests that these phrases are independent. The words "glory in the highest" were a common expression of praise in NT times and by no means require a retrojection.²⁶

If Matthew and Luke were writing imaginative "history," the narratives of Jesus' adult life could have provided material for them just as they did for James. However, the Synoptic birth narratives do

25. Ibid., 183.

26. In Luke 19:38, Luke's δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις is parallel to Mark and Matthew's ὡσαννὰ ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις. OT usage corresponds to this. *Psalms of Solomon* contains the words εὐδοξος ἐν ὑψίστοις κατοικῶν. See Georg Bertram, "ὑψιστος," *TDNT* 8.614-20.

not contain one clear instance of the midrashic convention of retrojecting events and words from Jesus' ministry into the birth account. This significant distinction between the *Protevangelium of James* and the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke should be sufficient to demonstrate that the Synoptic birth narratives and the apocryphal birth narratives belong to two different literary genres.

CONCLUSION

Identifications of the *Protevangelium of James* as Christian midrash do not substantiate the alleged presence of creative historiography in the Synoptic birth narratives. The apocryphal and canonical birth narratives are marked by disparate compositional techniques. The author of the *Protevangelium of James* developed his birth narrative by borrowing motifs from an OT account of miraculous birth. Some midrash critics have insisted that the Synoptic writers used this technique as well. However, the author of the *Protevangelium* was a skilled second-century midrashist who seems to have been unaware of the many alleged dependencies of the Gospel accounts on OT narratives that midrash critics insist would have been obvious to the ancient reader familiar with the genre. Rather than further developing parallels between the narrative of Christ's birth and OT narratives as one would expect, he created new material from OT narratives other than those said to have influenced the Synoptic accounts.

Furthermore, the author of the *Protevangelium of James* created details for his birth narrative by retrojecting motifs from the adult ministry of Christ back into Christ's infancy. Evidence for this compositional technique being used in the formation of Matthew and Luke's narratives is strikingly absent. The few instances of retrojection in the birth narratives that are alleged by critics are simply too far-fetched to be persuasive.

Thus, the two major traits of midrashic composition in the *Protevangelium of James* are lacking in the Matthean and Lucan birth narratives. These disparate literary tendencies suggest that the *Protevangelium of James* and the Synoptic Gospels belong to different genres. Because of this generic difference, scholars are unjustified in using creative historiography in the *Protevangelium of James* to argue for the use of creative historiography in Matthew and Luke.