Jesus and the Gospels
Part I

Professor Luke Timothy Johnson

THE TEACHING COMPANY ©
Luke Timothy Johnson, Ph.D.
Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins, Emory University

Luke Timothy Johnson is the Robert W. Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia. Born in 1943 and from the ages of 19 to 28 a Benedictine monk, Dr. Johnson received a B.A. in philosophy from Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, an M.Div. in theology from Saint Meinrad School of Theology in Indiana, and an M.A. in religious studies from Indiana University, before earning his Ph.D. in New Testament from Yale University in 1976.

Professor Johnson taught at Yale Divinity School from 1976 to 1982 and at Indiana University from 1982 to 1992 before accepting his current position at Emory. He is the author of 20 books, including The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation (2nd edition, 1999), which is used widely as a textbook in seminaries and colleges. He has also published several hundred articles and reviews. His most recent publications are: The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters and The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship. He is working on a study of the influence of Greco-Roman religion on Christianity.

Professor Johnson has taught undergraduates, as well as master’s level and doctoral students. At Indiana University, he received the President’s Award for Distinguished Teaching, was elected a member of the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching, and won the Brown Derby and Student Choice Awards for teaching. At Emory, he has twice received the “On Eagle’s Wings Excellence in Teaching” Award. In 1997–1998, he was a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar, speaking at college campuses across the country.

Professor Johnson is married to Joy Randazzo. They share 7 children, 12 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren. Johnson also teaches the courses called The Apostle Paul, Early Christianity: The Experience of the Divine, Practical Philosophy: The Greco-Roman Moralists, and Christianity in Great World Religions for The Teaching Company.
# Table of Contents

**Jesus and the Gospels**  
Part I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>Professor Biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Course Scope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lecture One Why Not “The Historical Jesus”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lecture Two The Starting Point—The Resurrection Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lecture Three The Matrix—Symbolic World of Greek and Jew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lecture Four Parallels—Stories of Greek and Jewish Heroes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lecture Five The Context—Jesus in the Memory of the Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Lecture Six Earliest Stages—Paul and the Oral Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Lecture Seven Why Compose Gospels?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Lecture Eight The Synoptic Problem and Its Solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Lecture Nine Gospel of Mark—Apocalyptic and Irony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Lecture Ten Gospel of Mark—Good News in Mystery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Lecture Eleven Gospel of Mark—Teacher and Disciples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Lecture Twelve Gospel of Mark—Passion and Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Timeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Glossary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Biographical Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jesus and the Gospels

 Scope:

Early Christianity was prolific in its production of Gospels—narratives that in one way or another have Jesus of Nazareth as their central character. There are many more Gospels than the four included in the New Testament. They are almost bewilderingly diverse in the way they portray Jesus.

The Gospels are fascinating literary compositions in their own right, and they raise puzzling questions about the figure they portray and about the religious movement, Christianity, that produced them. What accounts for the diversity of images? Is it possible to speak of a single Jesus when accounts about him are so various?

The most common approach to these questions is through history. The so-called “quest for the historical Jesus” asks who the human Jesus really was behind all the different portraits. One example of that quest is offered in the Teaching Company course called The Historical Jesus.

Although the historical question is legitimate and even compelling, it is also virtually impossible to answer satisfactorily. Certainly some historical statements can be made about the human Jesus that meet the strictest criteria of historical method. But such statements fall far short of providing a full or even meaningful grasp of Jesus’s identity. Worse, such historical efforts treat the actual Gospels shabbily. The literary effect of the compositions tends to be completely ignored, while the materials in them that are deemed authentic are ripped out of their literary contexts to be placed in the historian’s reconstruction.

The approach to Jesus and the Gospels taken in this course is not primarily historical but literary. Of course, history comes into play as we place the various Gospels within the development of Christianity. Our search, however, is not for the figure behind the Gospels but for the even more fascinating figure in them. Only after the full range of these literary representations has been considered can the question of “the real Jesus” adequately be posed—and it may not be answerable in strictly historical terms.

Our focus, in short, is not simply on Jesus but also on the Gospels as literary compositions. We want to know how they came to be, how they are related to one another, and how they communicate through their literary structure, plot, character development, themes, and symbolism. It is, after all, as literature that the Gospels influenced history. And it is through literature that present-day readers can continue to encounter Jesus.

The opening lectures set the context for the emergence of the Gospels as distinctive literary expressions: the historical, cultural, and experiential matrix in which Jesus traditions were selected and shaped by early Christian communities. Then, we consider the conditions that required a shift from oral tradition to written composition and the literary relations among the synoptic Gospels.

The four canonical Gospels (those found in the New Testament) of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John are next examined in considerable detail, precisely as literary expressions that witness to and interpret the Christian community’s convictions concerning Jesus. For each Gospel, we consider not only what is being said but also how it is being said. Such attention is appropriate both because of the literary richness of the canonical Gospels and because theirs are the portrayals of Jesus that have exercised the most influence through history.

We turn next to the wide range of apocryphal Gospels (those not found in the New Testament), including the intriguing infancy Gospels of James and Thomas, fragments from lost narrative Gospels deriving from Jewish Christian circles, and finally, the various compositions usually associated with Gnosticism that in one way or another can be considered Gospels.

The final lectures consider the illusive and compelling figure of Jesus, both as he is found in his diverse literary representations and as he is experienced in communities of faith that read the Gospels in the context of worship.

Material from Documents for the Study of the Gospels edited by David R. Cartlidge and David L. Dungan, is reproduced with permission from Augsburg Fortress, Publishers (Minneapolis, MN).

Material from The Nag Hammadi Library in English, 2nd Edition by James M. Robinson, is reproduced with permission from Brill Academic Publishers.
Why Not “The Historical Jesus”? 

Scope: Given that Jesus is a real human figure of the past, it would seem that the best way to learn about him would be through the discipline of history. The so-called “quest for the historical Jesus,” however, suggests that even though history is important as a tool, it also has real limits. A better approach to the human Jesus is through a literary study of the various compositions in which he is the central figure. This opening presentation shows how history is and is not helpful and why a comparative literary analysis of Gospels is at once a more responsible and more satisfying way of engaging this most fascinating yet illusive person.

Outline

I. That Jesus of Nazareth is a figure deserving study is not difficult, and usually not necessary, to demonstrate.
   A. Jesus is the single most pivotal figure in the shaping of Western culture: One cannot claim to understand the West without coming to grips with Jesus.
   B. Jesus is the founding figure of the largest world religion; understanding the religious behavior of two billion people involves understanding their allegiance to Jesus.
   C. Even though Christians are deeply divided on many points, and even disagree on the implications of this one, they all agree that the human Jesus is the measure of their identity.
   D. By any standard, Jesus is one of history’s most fascinating, compelling, and illusive figures.

II. Given that Jesus is a historical figure, many assume that the methods of history provide the best access to learning about him.
   A. Since the Enlightenment, a major project of religious scholarship was the “quest for the historical Jesus” (see Albert Schweitzer).
      1. That quest involved a decision concerning the nature of historiography: It cannot include the miraculous.
      2. The first classic work in this quest was *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, published in 1835 by David Friedrich Strauss, who made the fundamental decision that history has to do with human events in time and space.
      3. It also involved a search for the earliest (and least dogmatically tainted) source about Jesus.
      4. But all the sources turned out to be dogmatic.
      5. Although the quest failed to find a historically satisfying Jesus, it did clarify the character of the Gospels.
   B. In the second half of the 20th century, many scholars devoted themselves to a renewed historical search for Jesus.
      1. The search was impelled by the expectation that new materials, methods, and models might yield new results.
      2. In 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered at Wadi Qumran; even more important were the Gnostic Gospels discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945–1946.
      3. New methods of investigation include the extension of the new techniques of source criticism.
      4. The “Jesus Seminar,” founded in 1985 by Robert Funk, is only the most visible component in this new quest to find a Jesus who is unencumbered by Christian doctrine.
      5. In the end, however, the results suggest that the quest for the historical Jesus has really been the search for a “usable Jesus” and has had as much to do with theology as with history.

III. Although history has its uses for studying Jesus, it also has real limitations, and transgressing those limits has negative consequences.
   A. Serious historical analysis can provide substantial information concerning Jesus as a Jewish messianic figure executed by the Romans in the 1st century.
      1. The convergence of all outsider and insider sources provides a set of unassailable facts.
      2. The convergence of insider sources (Gospels and other New Testament writings) enables us to characterize Jesus’s ministry in terms of broad patterns.
B. Such historical conclusions are important even for believers, who consider Jesus to be more than a historical figure.
   1. Christians speak mythically about Jesus, but such mythic statements are applied to a real figure with real human features.
   2. Although anything said about Jesus beyond the bare historical facts demands imagination, those facts do provide some controls to imagination.
   3. The more history readers know, the better able they are to engage the ancient sources and appreciate them as literature.

C. Sober historiography cannot provide precisely what the imagination most desires: a sense of Jesus’s identity and self-understanding, a grasp of the meaning of his life.
   1. Such interpretation is provided by the Gospels that also provide most of the historical facts, but the Gospels are written from the perspective of the resurrection faith.
   2. Historians are, therefore, both enabled and constrained by the most important witnesses.

D. When historians seek to move beyond the boundaries posted by the sources themselves, two distortions occur.
   1. Proper historiographical methods are abused: The quest compels the manipulation of the sources in inappropriate ways.
   2. The resulting images of Jesus inevitably serve as a mirror of the questers: It is the usable Jesus who emerges from the study.

IV. The approach of this class makes use of history but engages the ancient sources as literature.
A. Rather than disassembling the Gospels in the search for earlier sources, this approach takes them seriously as literary productions and seeks to engage the figure of Jesus that each one presents.
B. The class unfolds in four unequal parts.
   1. The first set of lectures sets the stage for the composition of the Gospels by placing their production in the historical, cultural, and religious setting of the Christian movement.
   2. The second set of lectures considers the four canonical Gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke, John) in their social contexts, literary arrangements, and especially in their portrayal of Jesus and of discipleship.
   3. The third series of lectures provides a sense of the wide array of apocryphal Gospels, including several associated with Gnosticism, in the process considering some of the claims made about these Gospels by present-day writers.
   4. The final presentations take up the question of the relationship between the many literary representations and the one Jesus and consider the many ways in which Jesus continues to inspire “Gospels.”

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Concerning any figure or event of the past, how do we distinguish history from fiction?
2. How do historical and literary approaches to the figure of Jesus differ in their appreciation of the Gospels as compositions?
Lecture Two

The Starting Point—The Resurrection Experience

Scope: Apart from frustratingly brief allusions to Jesus and earliest Christianity in Greco-Roman and Jewish sources, everything we know about Jesus comes from Christian sources, that is, from people who regarded Jesus as far more than another historical figure. This presentation takes up the starting point for engaging Jesus then and now, namely, the distinctive Christian understanding of the resurrection. The Gospels are products of post-resurrection reflection on Jesus. What is the nature of the experience and conviction called the resurrection, and how does it help select and shape what is remembered about Jesus?

Outline

I. The resurrection experience is the starting point of the Christian religion and of reflection on Jesus.
   A. The problem for the historian is that there are only a few extant “outsider” sources that view Jesus from a standpoint other than that of faith in him.
   B. Most of our sources for knowledge of Jesus have an “insider” character: They view him from the perspective of the resurrection.
      1. The resurrection is not simply an event of the past for the first believers but the critical dimension of their own existence.
      2. Their memories of Jesus are both selected and shaped by these convictions: There is no saying or story about Jesus that is not derived from this tradition.
   C. The problem for the historian is the critical insight for the student of Christian Gospels into the peculiar character of these compositions.
      1. They were not, nor were they ever intended to be, simply histories of the past.
      2. They are witnesses and interpretations of Jesus grounded in the experiences of the witnesses and interpreters.
      3. The Gospels are, therefore, distinctively complex and layered compositions, addressing not only Jesus’s past but also his present activity among readers.

II. For this reason, it is important to grasp the nature of the resurrection experience and conviction among the early Christians.
   A. The earliest Christian compositions (especially the letters of Paul) make powerful claims concerning an experience of power:
      1. The claim to “being saved” is linked to the claim to a personal, transcendent, transforming power that is associated with “the Holy Spirit.”
      2. Christians regarded themselves as participants in a “new age” and a “new creation.”
   B. Such claims to religious experience are connected to convictions concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was executed under Roman authority.
      1. After his death, Jesus entered fully into a share of God’s existence and power: He was elevated to “the right hand” of God as Lord (kyrios)
      2. He is now “life-giving spirit” (pneuma soopoiooun) and powerfully present among his followers.
      3. Jesus as living Lord is the “person” who is the source of the spirit (the energy field) that changes them as persons and makes them a new creation and the authentic Israel.
   C. Appreciating these claims requires both historical and phenomenological approaches.
      1. The historian is not in a position to verify or invalidate religious claims made by ancient people.
      2. The historian is able to issue appropriate cautions drawn from analogy. It is not likely, for example, that every believer had intense experiences of the sort reported.
      3. Nevertheless, the historian must also recognize that the Christian movement’s astonishing dynamism must owe something to such claims having plausibility to its adherents.
III. Precisely the astonishing (even outrageous) claims to experience and conviction concerning Jesus create cognitive dissonance for those making them and require interpretation both of Jesus and of their own lives.

A. Cognitive dissonance is a concept drawn from the social sciences to describe the tension between contradictory ideas or between convictions and experiences.

B. In the case of Jesus, the manner of his death creates such a dissonance between the claim that he is the source of life and blessing and the convictions embedded in the symbolic world of the first believers.
   1. Paul speaks of “the cross” as “foolishness to Greeks” and the “stumbling block” to Jews (1 Cor. 1:18–25)—and all the first believers were one or the other!
   2. Jesus’s manner of death did not conform to Greek ideas of a potential “son of God.”
   3. Jesus’s death by crucifixion was one cursed by God (Deut. 21:23) and confirmed the Jewish perception that he was a false Messiah.

C. Not only Jesus’s manner of death, but also other experiences of the first Christians strengthened the sense of cognitive dissonance: If they were holy, why was there still sin among them; if they were in a new creation, why did they still die?

D. Cognitive dissonance can be resolved in several ways. The first Christians resolved theirs by reinterpreting their symbolic world (especially their scripture =Torah) in light of the crucified and raised Messiah Jesus.

IV. From the beginning, Christianity had a profoundly paradoxical character.

A. It spread across the ancient world with unprecedented rapidity, creating communities that eventually bound themselves together in an organization that, by the 4th century, was able to assume the status of the official religion of the Roman Empire.

B. At the same time, the movement was remarkably diverse, generating a tension-filled literature that reveals deep disagreements concerning the appropriate ways to live in the new creation and genuinely different perceptions of Jesus and his significance for its members’ lives.

Essential Reading:
Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does the early Christian conviction concerning the resurrection of Jesus differ from a claim that he was resuscitated?
2. How does the New Testament’s struggle to make sense of Jesus in light of Torah testify to the strength of the religious experience that gave birth to this religion?
Lecture Three
The Matrix—Symbolic World of Greek and Jew

Scope: Both Jesus and the Gospels arose in a 1st-century Mediterranean world in which four elements mixed and interacted: the deep cultural patterns of the Mediterranean, the ideals and realities of Greek civilization, the governance of Rome, and the religion of Israel. Each of these factors is complex in itself, and the interactions among them are deserving of extensive analysis. This presentation serves only to lay out the basics and remind readers of the Gospels of the rich cultural texture found in these literary compositions.

Outline

I. The ancient Christian Gospels are written in Greek about a Jewish Messiah who is executed by Roman authority over the 1st-century Mediterranean world. All four dimensions of this statement must be taken into account for an adequate reading of the Gospels.
   A. Jesus was “crucified under Pontius Pilate”: The extent and manner of Roman rule is the most external frame within which early Christianity must be placed.
   B. Paul said that Jesus’s manner of death was “foolish to Greeks,” but the New Testament is written in Greek and the forms of Greek rhetoric.
   C. Jesus’s Crucifixion was a “scandal to Jews,” but nothing in the Gospels is intelligible apart from the symbolic world of Torah.
   D. Jesus and early Christianity shared both the social forms and the cultural patterns that go deeper than Rome, Athens, or Jerusalem.

II. The deepest and shallowest influences on early Christianity have the least effect on the shaping of the religious movement and its literature.
   A. The deep influence of ancient Mediterranean culture, grounded in its topography, climate, economy, social arrangements, and broad religious convictions, is detectable mainly at the level of premise, the “things that go without saying.”
      1. An obvious example is the widespread perception that the divine is personal and deeply involved in human existence.
      2. A less obvious example is the role of patronage as a means of mitigating severe disparities in the social order.
   B. The effect of Roman rule, extended through military conquest, stabilized through colonization, legitimated through law, and made prosperous through marvelous engineering, is even less visible in early Christian writings.
      1. One reason is that, with the notable early exception of Paul and the later exceptions of martyrs, Christians were sufficiently insignificant to fly beneath the notice of official Roman authority.
      2. A more important reason is that Roman rule itself had largely adopted Greek civilization as its own.

III. The most important influence in shaping the Christian movement and its literature was the complex competition between Hellenism and Judaism.
   A. Christianity was born in Palestine as a sect within Judaism, the national-cultural-religious tradition of Israel, shaped by the symbolic world of Torah and older by far than Greek civilization.
      1. Torah is multidimensional in meaning: It is a set of texts but also connotes a story of the Jewish people found in those texts and the convictions arising from that story.
      2. Of particular importance are the connected convictions concerning the oneness of God, the election of the Jewish people, the covenant between the one God and his one people, and the observance of God’s commandments both as the form of righteousness within the covenant and as the source of wisdom in living.
      3. Although internally divided, Jews were perceived by others in the 1st-century Mediterranean world as a “second race,” remarkably unified in thought and practice and remarkably attractive to many Gentiles seeking a place in an alienating empire.
B. The younger and more aggressive influence on Judaism—and, therefore, on earliest Christianity—was Hellenism, which looked to classical Athens for its ideal.
1. When Alexander the Great set out to conquer the Persians in 334 B.C.E., he deliberately sought to extend the glories of Greek culture and political rule through subtle and powerful instruments of cultural hegemony.
2. Although Hellenism was not classical Athens, it succeeded in imposing the Greek language and cultural ideals on the East for almost 2,000 years.
C. The Judaism out of which Christianity developed had, for several centuries, been dancing a tightrope between assimilation and separation, the first required to live in the larger world, the second demanded by its ancestral traditions.
1. Outside Palestine, where most Jews lived and followed Torah, separation was accomplished by a life centered in Sabbath and synagogue, while assimilation was marked by use of the Greek language, rhetoric, and philosophy.
2. Inside Palestine, where symbols were linked to specific social and political institutions, Jews divided into sects that can be defined in terms of the way they understood the appropriate degree and sign of separation from a present and powerful Hellenistic influence.

IV. The complex cultural matrix of the 1st-century Mediterranean world has serious implications for the responsible reading of the Gospels as literary compositions.
A. From the side of Greek culture, readers must be aware of the Gospels’ composition in Greek, of the influence of parallel stories, and of the use of Hellenistic cultural norms and patterns of rhetoric.
B. From the side of Judaism, readers must remember the complexity of Jewish parties in the 1st century, the nature of the conflicts over Torah, and the role of the texts of Torah as an arena of competitive interpretation.
C. An important question to be posed to each Gospel is what aspect of the symbolic world it most engages, and the manner in which it engages it, as it shapes its portrayal of Jesus.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. As an analogy to the influence of Roman rule and Greek civilization, consider the ways in which the pervasiveness of contemporary American culture and military might affect local cultures around the world.
2. Consider this statement: “It is impossible to read the New Testament responsibly without an awareness of the complexity of the cultures out of which it arose.”
Lecture Four

Parallels—Stories of Greek and Jewish Heroes

Scope: Jesus was not the only hero about whom stories were told in Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures. This lecture provides a context for approaching the distinctive character of the Christian Gospels through a survey of stories told about other significant figures, both shorter tales (miracles, exorcisms, controversies) and longer narratives about great figures (historical, biographical). Special attention is given to the “Gospel” written by Philostratus, The Life of Apollonius of Tyana, which simply because it most resembles Christian Gospels, also shows how distinctive is their perspective.

Outline

I. Among ancient narratives concerning heroes, the Gospels are distinctive on a number of counts.
   A. They are unique in creating narratives about a figure of the past from the perspective of the resurrection experience: The hero is more alive than ever!
   B. They are distinctive for the way in which memories concerning the hero are handed down in religious communities in contexts of worship.
   C. The canonical Gospels, in particular, are remarkable for the intensity and extensiveness of engagement with the symbols of Torah.
   D. The canonical Gospels, again, are unusual—though not unique—for their focus on the suffering and death of their hero.

II. Nevertheless, the Gospels show signs of their cultural matrix, and much in them would have been immediately intelligible to ancient readers because of parallels in other literature.
   A. To some extent, this is a matter of the kinds of specific materials they contain.
      1. The forms of Jesus’s speech found in the Gospels resemble forms found in other ancient literature. The short sayings of sages (aphorisms) and controversies are found in both Jewish and Greco-Roman sages; parables are found in Rabbinic literature; longer discourses are found in the diatribes of the popular philosophers.
      2. Likewise, there are parallels in ancient literature to the short stories told about Jesus, especially those relating the healing of the sick and the exorcism of demons.
      3. There are even “life-after-death” stories that relate the ascension of heroes to the divine realm.
   B. To some extent, also, this is a matter of longer narratives that pay special attention to the heroism of ancient figures.
      1. In the Greek world, tales of the demigods and heroes are found in the great epics (Herakles, Odysseus).
      2. In Judaism, the Bible contains heroic stories concerning ancient leaders of the people (Judith, Esther).
   C. Hellenistic literature, in particular, developed the genre of biography, with many devoted to military or philosophical heroes.
      1. Among such lives are those concerning Alexander the Great and Pythagoras, as well as Plutarch’s collection of Parallel Lives.
      2. In Hellenistic Judaism as well, we find the biographical form applied to the patriarchs and Moses (Philo, Josephus). Of particular interest is the encomiastic treatment of the Maccabean martyrs (see 2 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees).

III. The most remarkable parallel to the Christian Gospels is Philostratus’s Life of Apollonius of Tyana.
   A. Apollonius was a 1st-century Pythagorean philosopher whom we know about from other sources.
   B. Around the year 218 C.E., the emperor Caracalla’s mother, Julia Domna, commissioned Philostratus to publish an encomiastic life—some suggest in deliberate response to the Christian accounts of Jesus.
   C. In any case, the Life is remarkable for its “Gospel-like” rendering of a philosopher’s life, but with these critical differences: Apollonius is never allowed to appear cowardly or at a loss for words, and there is certainly no “passion account” associated with this “divine man.”
Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How do the Greco-Roman and Jewish parallels to the Christian Gospels throw light on what is common and distinctive about them?
2. What does the development of biography—and the choice of subjects to which it is devoted—suggest about a culture?
Lecture Five
The Context—Jesus in the Memory of the Church

Scope: The Gospels are compositions that arise from the communal memory of the earliest Christian movement. This presentation sketches the first stages of that movement and the social settings within which Jesus was remembered. In the common life of the first urban Christians—their activities of preaching, worship, and teaching—Jesus is remembered, not simply as a figure of the past, but as one who continues to be present in the lives of those who remember him.

Outline

I. The earliest Gospels are compositions that arise out of the life of early Christian communities and bear the marks of that origin.
   A. In contrast to some later Gospels that are clearly the work of literary invention, with only a loose connection to living traditions, the writers of the earliest Gospels both rely on and address traditions that arose in actual communities.
   B. The social setting of tradition, the process of oral transmission, and the forms in which the memory of Jesus was handed on are, therefore, all pertinent to an intelligent reading of the Gospels.

II. From the Acts of the Apostles and Paul’s letters, it is possible to gain a rough grasp of the Christian movement’s first rapid expansion across the Mediterranean world, from Jerusalem to Rome, within the first 30 years of its existence (c. 30–60).
   A. Acts is deficient in some ways but provides an essential geographical and chronological framework for the movement of early witnesses and missionaries.
      1. Acts is selective in its account and has a clear bias as well but, for the most part, must be considered basically reliable in what it reports.
      2. The account in Acts can be corrected and expanded by the use of Paul’s letters, which do not detract from but, rather, enhance the remarkable portrayal in Acts.
   B. Together, the sources provide the picture of a movement that expanded with great rapidity and had to accomplish major transitions from the beginning, without strong external or internal controls.
      1. The formation of communities in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy within 25 years is all the more remarkable because it was accomplished without political means and under duress.
      2. Because of rapid movement and instability (persecution), the new religion had to accomplish five transitions at once: geographical, cultural, demographic, linguistic, and sociological.
      3. Such transitions had to be negotiated without strong controls, either institutional (Jerusalem was a poor and weak mother community) or textual (there was as yet no New Testament!).
      4. The remarkable historical fact is not the diversity in early Christianity but that there is any discernible unity to the religion.

III. In the life of local communities (ekklesia = church), a number of activities provided the social context for the transmission of the memory of Jesus.
   A. Preaching appears in Acts and Paul’s letters as a means by which communities were founded, but its exact role in transmitting traditions about Jesus is uncertain.
      1. In Acts, we find missionary speeches, but these represent the literary constructions of the author, Luke.
      2. Acts also portrays missionary preaching in synagogues, and this may well reflect a short-lived historical period in which Jewish objections to Jesus as Messiah were voiced and responded to with defenses drawn from scripture.
      3. It is possible that preaching related stories of Jesus’s wonderworking, and it is likely that preaching, on some occasions, related the story of Jesus’s suffering and death, as well as his resurrection.
   B. Worship is always a rich opportunity for the transmission of tradition, especially as associated with ritual actions.
      1. Baptism could well have been the occasion for telling of Jesus’s baptism by John and relating the links between baptism and Christ’s death and resurrection.
2. The Lord’s Supper, as we know from 1 Cor. 11, was an occasion for relating the words Jesus spoke to his followers at his last meal. It could also be the setting for the story of other meals—including the feeding of the multitude—in Jesus’s life.

3. Christian assemblies (at least in Corinth) also involved forms of ecstatic utterance. Prophecy would be a mode in which “the risen Lord” could continue to speak “in the Spirit.”

C. Activities of teaching undoubtedly took place in connection with worship and in other, more quotidian, settings. Probably the greatest numbers of Jesus traditions were transmitted through teaching.

1. The memory of what Jesus had said and done would be evoked by the need to make decisions that faced believers in their common lives and in conflicts with outsiders, especially fellow Jews.

2. The memory of Jesus would also serve to explain some of their common practices that were distinctive.

IV. The character of such religious memory (anamnesis) is complex and rich, involving less the accurate account of the past than the recollection of the past to inform the present.

A. From the perspective of 2,000 years, the first 30 years of Christianity seems a very short period, but in terms of human experience, it is also a long period of time.

B. In the communities of faith in the risen Lord, the memories of Jesus were selected and shaped in response to the continuing experiences and convictions of believers.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Why is it more remarkable that Christianity has any coherence than that it is diverse in its expressions?
2. In what ways is social memory both more fragile and more powerful than individual memory?
Lecture Six
Earliest Stages—Paul and the Oral Tradition

Scope: Over a period of some 40 years, the memory of Jesus was selected and shaped by the continuing experience of believers in communities. In this presentation, we consider the basic patterns of memory found in the oral tradition, according to the discipline called form criticism, as we note the forms of Jesus’s sayings and deeds; we also consider the various ways in which memories of Jesus reached writing, in the letters of Paul, in the passion accounts, and in collections of Jesus’s sayings (Q).

Outline

I. Before the appearance of the Gospels as compositions, the memory of Jesus was transmitted in widely scattered Christian communities in both oral and written segments.
   A. The Gospels are not composed by eyewitnesses immediately after the resurrection and used by preachers; by “good news” (= Gospel), Paul means the message of what God had done in Jesus.
   B. Rather, the Gospels stand at the end of a complex development of tradition in the common life of churches across a period of some 50 years (30–70); they are crystallizations of shared tradition.
   C. In Hellenism and Judaism alike, oral tradition and scribal activity were closely intertwined.
      1. Letters, for example, are written and sent to others, but they are often dictated and are read out loud to their recipients.
      2. Similarly, an orator or teacher could prepare notes for an oral presentation, and these could be inscribed in writing as notes by hearers.

II. The main vehicle for transmitting the memory of Jesus over a period of some 40 years was through oral tradition, an activity of anamnesis within communities.
   A. The scholarly approach called form criticism (Formgeschichte) devotes itself to the analysis of the oral tradition that precedes the Gospels but is also found within them.
      1. Apart from the passion narratives, stories and sayings in the Gospels appear most often in the form of isolated units (pericopes).
      2. These pericopes appear in different places in the Gospels; thus, they are units that can be moved around.
      3. Many of the stories and sayings fall into literary forms that resemble those of the larger culture; they are more typical than unique.
      4. Communities and teachers did not each have complete collections of such materials (see 1 Cor. 7:10 and Mark 10:11–12; 1 Cor. 8–10 and Mark 7:19).
   B. The organic process of oral tradition in communities can be imagined by analogy to a family remembering its matriarch at a family reunion.
      1. The memory is generated by participation in a ritual meal: We “remember Grandma” because we are eating “her” pumpkin pie.
      2. The memories are communicated non-systematically and anecdotally, and they tend to fall into natural patterns: Grandma at the grocery, Grandma in controversy.
      3. There is considerable variation in detail but remarkable consistency in the central point or punch line.
      4. The point is not to compose an authorized biography correct in every fact (although eyewitnesses can correct attribution) but to capture an identity that is also shared by the narrators: “That’s Grandma!”
   C. The memory of Jesus was similarly passed down in communities gathered for worship or teaching.
      1. The form is the anecdote or the saying; there is greater variation in details of circumstance than in the essential point.
      2. The memories fall into categories of: “things said” and “things done,” each with subcategories.
      3. Things said range from free-floating aphorisms and parables to controversies embedded in specific circumstances.
      4. Things done include exorcisms and healings, which possess almost identical forms.
III. During the same 40-year period of the oral tradition, the memory of Jesus also found its way into the earliest Christian letters.

A. Paul’s letters are usually singled out for what they don’t tell us about Jesus, but in fact, they are a valuable repository of Jesus traditions.
   1. At the simplest level, Paul refers to the basic facts of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection, though outside a narrative recital.
   2. Paul quotes Jesus infrequently but authoritatively (1 Cor. 7:10; 9:14; 11:23–25).
   3. Paul alludes to the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16) or the “law of Christ” as normative for Christian behavior.

B. The Letter of James may be our earliest Christian composition, and it, too, is remarkable for its many allusions to the sayings of Jesus (James 2:5; 5:12).

IV. There were, in all likelihood, stages of compilation and composition on the way to the full written Gospels.

A. Because it is the “dissonance” that first needs to be dealt with, because we find aspects of it in our earliest letters, and because the sections of the canonical Gospels dealing with the suffering and death of Jesus are the most detailed and consistent in their presentation, the passion account was probably the first part of the Gospel tradition to reach the form of a sustained recital, whether oral or written.

B. Many scholars think that many of Jesus’s sayings reached a written stage before the composition of the first narrative Gospel (Q), and it is possible that some of Jesus’s miracles were organized in the form of aretalogies.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does it affect one’s reading of a Gospel if it is understood not as history but as “witness and interpretation”?
2. What does the rapid formation of the passion story suggest about the importance and difficulty of that memory for the first Christians?
Lecture Seven
Why Compose Gospels?

Scope: The writings of Gospels represented a real shift in the understanding of “good news” (*euangelion*). The answer to the question “Why compose Gospels?” also leads to a consideration of the nature of the Gospels. Theories that connect such an important innovation to a temporary or local crisis are inadequate. The need to compose connected narratives of Jesus’s ministry, death, and resurrection arises from a combination of pressures that converge around the time of the Jewish War and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Outline

I. The composition of full narrative Gospels represents a fundamental shift in early Christian consciousness.
   A. When Paul speaks of the “good news” (*euangelion*) by which humans are being saved, he refers not to stories about Jesus, but to the *kerygma*, the proclamation of what God had done through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
   B. The term *euangelion* takes on a whole new dimension, referring formally to a written composition and materially to what Jesus did and said in the power of God. The ministry—and, eventually, the birth and infancy—of Jesus are now included in the meaning of the “good news.”

II. The transition to written Gospels did not happen without preparation and did not entirely end oral tradition.
   A. We have described some of the probable stages of composition toward full Gospels: the compilation of sayings and, possibly, of miracles, the virtually certain stabilization of the passion story.
   B. Even when Gospels are composed, oral tradition continues.
      1. See the “longer ending” of Mark found in many manuscripts (Mark 16:9–20).
      2. Another example is the “pericope of the adulterous woman” in John 8:1–11.
      3. The “longer ending” of the Lord’s Prayer probably derives from liturgical usage (see Matt. 6:9–13 and the *Didache*).
      4. The “sayings of Jesus” found in the so-called *agrapha* and in apocryphal Gospels may well have roots in oral tradition.

III. The reasons for finally composing full narrative Gospels after such a long period of oral tradition must have been real and weighty.
   A. Some proposed causes are insufficient because they were either local or temporary or were already being dealt with through the means of letters.
      1. The “delay of the *parousia*” is sometimes invoked, but it is not clear how fervid and universal was the expectation of an immediate return of Jesus, nor how much of a “crisis” this delay really was.
      2. Issues pertaining to right morals or the proper understanding of Jesus are already addressed in the epistolary literature.
   B. The most probable incentive to composing Gospels was a combination of factors connected to the Jewish War with Rome in 67–70.
      1. By the year 70, many eyewitnesses—especially such leaders as Peter and Paul—had died.
      2. In the Jewish War, the Christian community abandoned the city of Jerusalem, meaning that the symbolic center of the movement was lost along with the rootedness of the Jesus tradition in Palestine.
      3. Relations between messianist and non-messianist Jews were exacerbated by the events of the war.
      4. Christianity was becoming increasingly Gentile in makeup, again threatening the Jewish roots of the movement.
   C. This cluster of circumstances made it important to “remember Jesus” in a new and more authoritative manner, both to preserve the best of the oral tradition and to enable future generations to encounter a Jesus who was recognizably the one proclaimed by the first generations.
IV. Understanding the “pre-history” of the Gospels helps present-day readers appreciate two important features of these compositions.

A. We can appreciate the complex, multilayered character of the Gospels, recognizing that they always address three levels: the events of Jesus’s life, the concerns of the church that remembered and transmitted those events, and the concerns of the evangelist who has organized the memories in a sustained narrative.

B. We can appreciate the choices made by the evangelists (both canonical and apocryphal) in their compositions, because the oral tradition made possible a number of different selections of material, yielding a number of different portraits of Jesus: sage, thaumaturge, revealer, martyr.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
D. Catchpole, *The Quest for Q* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993).

Questions to Consider:
1. In what ways did the composition of Gospels change the Christian understanding of the “good news”?
2. Why is the year 70 C.E. both literally and symbolically pivotal for Jews and Christians?
Lecture Eight
The Synoptic Problem and Its Solutions

Scope: Three of the canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are alike and different in striking and puzzling ways. This lecture exposes the synoptic problem and offers solutions. All critical scholars agree that there is a literary relationship of dependence among the three narratives. The traditional position is that Matthew was the first written, with Luke and Mark dependent on Matthew. The dominant scholarly position is called the two-source hypothesis, which proposes that Matthew and Luke use Mark in the construction of their Gospels, and together, also rely on a hypothetical source of sayings, Q.

Outline

I. The canonical Gospels are given titles in the manuscripts: “the good news according to X”: It is natural to ask about the authors and the circumstances in which they wrote.
   A. The ancient approach was through authorship, relying on traditions found in patristic writings.
      1. A 2nd-century figure named Papias averred that Matthew wrote first in the Hebrew dialect and was translated by others; Mark is a translation of the preaching of Peter.
      2. In the (probably) late-2nd-2nd-century Muratorian Canon, Luke is identified as a physician and companion of Paul, while John is the Beloved Disciple of the Fourth Gospel and the Seer on Mt. Patmos.
      3. The problem with this approach is that identifications are based on guesswork, they have a strong apologetic interest—connecting evangelists to apostles—and they don’t help in actually interpreting the Gospels.
      4. They also make even more acute the question of diversity in the accounts: John and Matthew are both supposed to be eyewitnesses, yet their Gospels are least alike!
   B. The contemporary approach is through literary and historical analysis of the compositions themselves.
      1. Scholars seek to determine from the texts themselves the circumstances of writing, in terms of social setting, themes, and the like, with little attention to the identity of the actual authors.
      2. The reconstruction of circumstances then becomes the framework for the interpretation of the Gospel.
      3. There are also problems with this approach—not least that of another form of circularity and guesswork!—and the evidence can often point in more than one direction.

II. The most pressing problem facing the critical analysis of the canonical Gospels is the literary relationship of the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
   A. John’s Gospel is so different from the other three that it poses questions of its own, but these three Gospels are alike and different in such intricate and complex ways that they present a distinct synoptic problem (they can be “seen together” in columns).
   B. The data to be considered is complex, involving language, selection of material, and sequence.
      1. In the Greek, the similarity in language tends toward identity: For phrases and clauses, the language in all three is identical; when they differ, Matthew and Luke tend to vary from Mark in different ways.
      2. About 90 percent of Mark’s material is found in both Matthew and Luke, whereas about 10 percent of Mark is found in neither Matthew nor Luke.
      3. Matthew and Luke share a substantial amount of material (mainly sayings that also have a strong linguistic similarity) not found in Mark.
      4. Matthew and Luke also each have material unique to each, designated M and L material.
      5. In terms of the sequence of material, Luke and Matthew differ in their order except where they both agree with Mark.
   C. Here is a situation in which popular, uncritical answers are insufficient because they do not really address the data.
      1. It is true that teachers can say similar things at different times or perform similar actions, but this does not cover the character of the linguistic phenomena.
      2. It is true that eyewitnesses can have different perspectives and versions, but the linguistic pattern does not fit that of eyewitness behavior, and the appeal to eyewitnesses does not cover the circumstances in the first place.
D. The data suggest, indeed demonstrate, a literary relationship of dependence among these three Gospels, and all critical scholars agree that one of the Gospels was written first and the others used it as a literary source for their versions.

III. The minority scholarly opinion follows the ancient tradition of Matthean priority.

A. Matthew is written first, then translated into Greek; according to Augustine, Mark then epitomizes Matthew.
   1. The solution is appealing because it is simple, because it agrees with church tradition, and because it accounts for the “Jewish” character of Matthew.
   3. There are reasons why the majority of scholars do not accept this traditional view: It is actually not simpler—demanding multiple recensions of Matthew and Luke; the “Jewish” character of Matthew has other explanations; and most of all, why would Mark both leave out choice materials and mangle the superior Greek of his sources?

B. The majority of critical scholars adopt what is called the two-source (sometimes the four-source) hypothesis.
   1. Mark writes first, with Matthew and Luke using his Gospel independently as a written source, independently correcting what they consider inferior Greek.
   2. Matthew and Luke both use another written source (conventionally designated as Q).
   3. Matthew and Luke each have independent sources (or compose distinctive material), called M and L.
   4. The value of the hypothesis—and it remains a hypothesis—is that it best explains the phenomenon of sequence and the linguistic patterns.
   5. The limits of the hypothesis are also real: It does not cover every case, and care must be taken not to reify Q.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does the synoptic problem set up a tension between critical analysis of the text and ancient tradition?
2. What does the literary interdependence of Matthew, Mark, and Luke suggest about the early Christian understanding of “tradition”?
Scope: The Gospel of Mark is the first written but is far from being simply a source for Matthew and Luke. Some regard it as clumsily constructed, but others consider it the most subtly crafted Gospel. In many ways, Mark is the strangest Gospel. It has an odd ending and a strange beginning. This presentation deals with the literary aspects of Mark, with particular attention given to the way Mark creates dramatic tension through the arrangement of stories, the apocalyptic outlook of the Gospel, and the ironic way in which the evangelist turns apocalyptic.

Outline

I. The distinctive interpretation of Jesus in each Gospel can be appreciated through literary engagement.
   A. The reconstruction of historical circumstances is difficult in itself and of limited value.
      1. Apocalyptic literature, for example, can point to a context of persecution but can also address a situation of relative social marginalization.
      2. Especially when there are no controls (such as we find in the case of Matthew and Luke), interpretation of the Gospel completely in terms of hypothetical historical circumstances tends toward circularity.
   B. Literary engagement with each Gospel takes more into account than the simple selection of materials.
      1. It considers the way in which each evangelist provides literary structure and authorial comment.
      2. It notes the role of the dominant symbols (often scriptural) used by the Gospel.
      3. It pays specific attention to the portrayal of Jesus and the disciples through the evangelist’s use of titles, characteristic actions, and relationships.

II. Mark is more than the source of Matthew and Luke. It is a distinctive literary voice within the Gospel tradition, although Mark’s literary skill is diversely assessed.
   A. Some observers regard Mark as not only crude in his Greek but clumsy in his narrative construction.
      1. His overall plot from baptism to burial is straightforward, involving Jesus’s initial period of ministry in Galilee, which culminates in Peter’s confession (8:29); followed by a series of instructions to his disciples, a messianic entry into Jerusalem, a set of controversies with his opponents, then his arrest and execution.
      2. Furthermore, in this plot, the passion account looms as disproportionate and other materials appear in apparently unimaginative clusters.
   B. Another scholarly assessment stresses, in contrast, Mark’s distinctive literary artistry.
      1. The technique of rapid “cutting” from scene to scene now appears to have a cinematic quality, and Mark’s use of triads appears as a strong compositional technique (see, for example, 3:13–35).
      2. The abrupt beginning and ending of his Gospel appears to these critics not as clumsy but as artful, requiring “construction” by the reader.
      3. Above all, Mark’s depiction of the relations among the characters serves admirably his desire to teach his own readers about the nature of discipleship.

III. The symbolic world of Mark is apocalyptic, but Mark gives it a distinctively ironic twist.
   A. Jewish apocalyptic literature proliferated from the period of the Maccabees (see Daniel) and is found in several New Testament writings (Paul, Revelation).
      1. Apocalyptic literature uses the vehicle of visions to present an alternative view of history. Its elaborate symbolism of numbers, beasts, and cosmic catastrophes serves to show that, despite appearances to the contrary, God is in charge of history, not the forces of evil.
      2. Apocalyptic literature is classically an “insider” literature of those who see themselves as persecuted or oppressed: Those receiving revelations have knowledge of what is going to happen, hidden from others.
B. Mark 13 is often called “the little apocalypse,” having typical features of the genre, but Mark’s entire narrative portrays a cosmic battle between the Son of God and the unclean spirits. And Mark turns reader expectations by reversing the positions of insider and outsider (see Mark 13:14, 37).

1. The reader knows that Jesus is Christ and Son of God from the beginning (1:1).
2. Jesus’s true identity is known to the demons (1:24) but not to his followers.
3. The only human character who recognizes his true identity is his executioner (15:39).

IV. Mark’s use of irony enables a double-edged reading of his fast-paced narrative.

A. On the surface, it is a story of the past about Jesus’s powerful deeds and tragic end and a story about his followers who became the first leaders of the community.

B. On another level, it is a story about the present: The readers who naturally identify with the disciples are challenged by the account of their failure.

Essential Reading:
The Gospel of Mark.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:

1. How can Mark’s Gospel be considered by some readers as the result of “clumsy construction” and by others as “artistic”?

2. Why is the literary technique of irony particularly appropriate to the story that Mark is telling?
Lecture Ten

Gospel of Mark—Good News in Mystery

Scope: Mark’s Jesus is both powerful and paradoxical. His proclamation of the rule of God is demonstrated by mastery over unclean spirits and the ability to heal. Yet his teaching in parables resists easy comprehension. Only demons recognize him as the Holy One. For humans, Jesus is the mystery that both attracts and repels. And despite being God’s chosen Son, his self-designation as “Son of Man” points to a destiny of suffering for the sake of others. The only human character that proclaims him as “God’s Son” is his executioner.

Outline

I. On the surface, Mark’s narrative appears to be simple and straightforward, but its reflective use of the term gospel (1:1, 14, 15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9) shows the author’s complex purposes in shaping his story.
   A. Jesus is the proclaimer of God’s rule, who conquers demons yet submits to human suffering.
   B. He is the teacher whose words do not clarify but confound.
      1. In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is called “teacher” by everyone, both followers and opponents.
      2. But his parables serve to turn away rather than attract, and his calls to discipleship are severe.
      3. Mark presents Jesus as the “mystery of the kingdom of God” (mysterion tes basileias tou theou) who is identified as “Son” by God (1:11; 9:7), recognized as such by demons (5:7), but rejected by the leaders of his people, and by his followers, he is misunderstood, betrayed, and abandoned.
      4. All these elements are displayed in the artfully constructed opening sequence of Mark’s Gospel.

II. All of Mark’s literary techniques are in service of a powerful story of cosmic and human conflict.
   A. The opening sequence (1:1–15) is an extraordinarily compressed introduction to the basic drama.
      1. There is no infancy account, but Mark connects this good news to the words of the prophets (1:2–3).
      2. Mark quotes scripture rarely, but when he does, he does so purposefully.
      3. John the Baptist appears only in his role as the forerunner of the Messiah (1:4–8); later, Mark will make John’s death a foreshadowing of Jesus’s passion (6:17–29).
      4. Jesus’s baptism is also an identification (to him and to readers) of him as God’s Son (1:9–11).
      5. Jesus is in the wilderness with demons and returns to proclaim the good news of God’s kingdom (1:12–15).
   B. The beginning of Jesus’s ministry in Galilee unfolds three basic patterns that persist through the Gospel narrative:
      1. Jesus powerfully demonstrates his authority to teach through his works of power, especially exorcisms (see 3:7–11).
      2. Jesus draws people to him and, from those so attracted, selects disciples to extend his work and to “be with him” (3:13–19).
      3. Jesus experiences rejection among the leaders of the people (3:1–6).
   C. Jesus, the teacher of parables, is himself the parable of the kingdom (4:1–41).
      1. Jesus tells parables in response to rejection, and his first parable (the sower) serves as a commentary on his own mission (4:1–9, 4:14–20).
      2. The disciples, who as “insiders” are supposed to understand the parables, do not (4:10–13).
      3. Jesus’s calming of the storm at sea shows how Mark regards him as the mystery to be deciphered (4:35–41).

III. The drama of the Messiah becomes the drama of discipleship (5:1–8:26).
   B. These doublets move the story from the question of the disciples in 4:41 (“Who is this man that even the wind and the seas obey him?”) to the question of Jesus in 8:29 (“Who do people say that I am? Who do you say that I am?”).
C. The drama centers, as earlier, on responses to Jesus’s wonderworking: Jesus is rejected by his townsfolk (6:1–6) and by the Pharisees and Scribes (7:1–23), but ordinary people respond to his wonders with faith (5:34; 6:30–31; 7:35–36).

D. The disciples, however, are astonishingly unperceptive and dull (5:31; 7:18; 6:52; 8:17–21).

E. Mark uses the strange healings of 7:31–37 and 8:22–26 to symbolize the condition of Jesus’s followers.

**Essential Reading:**

**Supplementary Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. What is Mark’s distinctive understanding of “the mystery of the kingdom of God,” and how does his use of parables express that understanding?
2. How do the powerful deeds of Jesus express something of Mark’s understanding of “the kingdom of God?”
Lecture Eleven
Gospel of Mark—Teacher and Disciples

Scope: Because Mark teaches his readers by showing rather telling, the drama of discipleship in his narrative serves to instruct his readers concerning their own allegiance to Jesus. Jesus appears as a teacher who calls disciples (learners) to be with him. But his verbal teaching is difficult (see chapters 4 and 13), and his example is frightening. His chosen disciples, moreover, are portrayed in negative terms. They are slow to understand and, worse, are disloyal. Mark constructs the narrative of Jesus’s journey to Jerusalem in chapters 8–10 as an instruction on the nature of discipleship: Readers are to imitate him, not his first followers.

Outline

I. Mark invites his readers to “follow Jesus through the Gospel” by the way in which he has structured the relationship between Jesus and his disciples.
   A. The term disciple (mathetes) means “learner,” a relationship that was common in the Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures.
   B. What makes Mark’s portrait so distinctive is that Jesus is a teacher not in what he says but in what he does and what he is, while “learning Jesus” is not a matter of understanding his speech or even his identity but of obedience and imitation of him.
   C. When Mark tells us Jesus chose 12 disciples out of those who were first attracted to him, he identifies three characteristics of these 12:
      1. They are to preach the kingdom of God.
      2. They are to exorcise demons.
      3. They are to be with Jesus.
   D. In the first part of his narrative, Mark showed how the disciples lacked the genuine understanding of insiders, even as demons knew who Jesus was and the needy approached him in faith.

II. Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah (= Christos) represents an important turning point in Mark’s narrative.
   A. Of all the messianic expectations extant in Jesus’s time, the one characteristic not associated with the messiah is that the messiah would suffer.
   B. It is this aspect of Jesus’s identity that Jesus is now going to reveal.
   C. Peter’s confession is preceded by one of two healing stories that Matthew and Luke omit, because they make Jesus look like someone who does not have all the power he ought to have.
      1. In the story, Jesus heals a blind man.
      2. At first, the man cannot see clearly.
      3. Jesus touches the man again, and he then sees clearly.
      4. Peter’s confession is an imperfect insight. He needs “more healing” before he can clearly identify Jesus.
   D. Mark places the Caesarea Philippi incident at the climax of the narrative running from 4:41–8:26.
      1. The story moves from the disciples’ question about Jesus to Jesus’s question to them.
      2. The healing of the deaf man and the blind man symbolize the gradual movement of the disciples toward partial insight.
   E. Peter’s confession is followed by the first of three formal predictions of his passion by Jesus, a prediction to which Peter responds inadequately (8:31–38).
   F. The transfiguration account (9:2–8) allows the author to show the disciples—and readers—Jesus’s deepest identity (transfigured as God’s son) and Peter’s fundamental misunderstanding of the Messiah’s mission and, at the end, to warn the readers to listen to Jesus alone.
   G. The disciples’ failure to learn much from the transfiguration is shown by their lack of understanding and inadequacy in the stories immediately following it (9:9–13).
III. As Jesus turns to Jerusalem and his fate, Mark structures the narrative between Peter’s confession and Jesus’s entry into the city by means of a pedagogy of discipleship.

A. Three times, Jesus solemnly announces the destiny that awaits him: As the Son of Man, he will suffer for the sake of others before experiencing resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34).

B. Three times, these predictions are followed by his chosen followers fundamentally misunderstanding both Jesus and the nature of discipleship (8:32; 9:33–34; 10:35–37).

C. Three times, Jesus uses the occasion to instruct the disciples (and the readers) on the true nature of his mission and on being his follower (8:34–38; 9:35–37; 10:38–45).

D. With a consistency that must be deliberate, Jesus juxtaposes his flawed followers and children.
   1. The healing of the child with a demon shows the power of faith in the father and the lack of it in the disciples (9:14–29).
   2. In contrast to the desire of the disciples for greatness, Jesus places a child as the sign of littleness to be embraced (9:36–37).
   3. In response to the desire by the disciples to prevent others from participating in the ministry, Jesus warns about causing scandal to little ones (9:42–48).
   4. When the disciples seek to prevent children from approaching Jesus, he states that the manner in which one receives a child is the measure of the reception of the kingdom of God (10:13–16).

IV. At the end of Jesus’s journey to Jerusalem, Mark juxtaposes two figures who represent different responses to Jesus.

A. The story of the rich man shows someone whose wealth prevents him from fully following Jesus (10:17–31).

B. In contrast, the blind beggar Bartimaeus represents the ideal response of the Markan disciple: following Jesus on the way to his suffering (10:46–52).

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Why is the portrayal of the disciples critical to Mark’s portrayal of Jesus?
2. What understanding of discipleship emerges from Jesus’s corrections to his disciples on the way to Jerusalem?
Lecture Twelve
Gospel of Mark—Passion and Death

Scope: Mark has prepared his readers for Jesus’s suffering and death by a series of prophetic statements, but the importance of Jesus’s death—and the way he died—is shown by the amount of attention Mark gives to Jesus’s last days. After Jesus’s symbolic entry into the city, he engages in a series of controversies with leaders; after his last meal and prayer, he is arrested, tried, beaten, and crucified. Mark’s account denies nothing of the scandal of Jesus’s death, but renders it meaningful by clothing it, especially in its climactic moments, with the garments of scripture.

Outline

I. Mark’s shaping of the “good news” is distinctive in its emphasis on the suffering of the Messiah.
   A. So far as we know, Mark is the first to join traditions of Jesus’s sayings and wonders to the account of his suffering and death.
      1. The resurrection perspective in Mark is real, but muted, whereas the insistence on Jesus’s human experience of conflict and pain is explicit and emphatic.
      2. Mark thereby lays a fundamental premise for “the Christian myth”: Jesus’s humanity is significant not for its deeds but for its deep identification with human suffering.
   B. Not only is the narrative of Jesus’s last days lengthy and detailed, but it is prepared for by the earlier narrative.
      1. The intention of the Pharisees and Herodians to kill Jesus is marked already in 3:6, and the future betrayal by Judas is noted in 3:19.
      2. The three great passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–35) prepare the reader for the events to come.

II. The period between the entry into the city and the passion builds dramatic tension and prepares for the violent climax of the story.
   A. Mark weaves together in 11:1–26 Jesus’s messianic entry into Jerusalem and the fate of the temple.
      1. After being hailed by his followers, Jesus enters the temple area, then departs (11:1–11)
      2. The next day, he curses a fig tree that failed to yield fruit (11:12–14) and enters the temple precincts again to drive out the money changers (11:15–19); then, Jesus’s disciples see the withered fig tree, and he teaches them about the necessity of faith (11:20–26).
      3. The destruction of the temple is thematically interwoven with the subsequent death of Jesus: He predicts its destruction (13:2) and is charged with that statement at his hearing (14:58); at his death, the temple veil is torn (15:38).
   B. Within the temple area, Jesus confronts his opponents in a series of debates (11:27–44)
      1. For readers, Jesus’s responses to various Jewish leaders enable them to position their movement within Judaism on important issues.
      2. These responses also serve to build dramatic tension, beginning with a challenge to Jesus’s authority (11:28) and concluding with his attack on the Scribes (12:38–44).
   C. The eschatological discourse in chapter 13 likewise serves a double literary role.
      1. In terms of content, it identifies Jesus as a prophet who foretells the destruction of the temple (13:2–8) and the troubles to be faced by his followers (13:9–13).
      2. Dramatically, it positions Jesus and his close followers as separate from and speaking against the temple (13:3).

III. Mark’s passion account gains its dramatic force from its intricate play between outer plot and inner meaning.
   A. At the level of plot, Jesus is caught up by the machinations of others and appears as a passive pawn.
      1. He is betrayed by Judas (14:10–11), arrested by the temple authorities (14:43), interrogated by the Sanhedrin (14:53–65), and tried by Pilate (15:1–15).
      2. His disciples prove to be not only unintelligent but faithless: Judas betrays him for money, the disciples sleep when he asks them to watch (14:38–42), Peter denies him out of fear (14:66–72), and all his followers except the women abandon him (14:50–52).
B. At the level of meaning, Mark shows that God’s deeper plan is being worked out.
   1. The anointing of Jesus’s feet [sic; should be “head”] by a woman at Bethany (14:3–9) shows that Jesus understands his destiny as the “good news.”
   2. At the last supper with his followers, Jesus shares bread and wine as his body and blood given for them (14:12–25).
   3. In the garden, Jesus’s prayer to his father reveals that he dies in obedience to God’s will (14:32–42).

IV. Mark’s account of Jesus’s death shows how the scandal of the cross is clothed with the garments of Torah.
   A. Mark’s account maintains all the aspects of Jesus’s death that were foolish to Greeks and a stumbling block to Jews: He is abandoned by his followers, offers no defense, shows great fear, suffered physically, is executed as a criminal, and cries out to God as one abandoned by God.
   B. But Mark shows that Jesus was a righteous man, radically obedient to God, dying innocently for the sake of others, and in fulfillment of Torah.
      1. Jesus repeatedly predicts his suffering and connects it to the fulfillment of prophecy (14:27–28).
      2. Jesus expresses his obedience to God in his prayer (14:36).
      3. The description of his actual death uses the language of Psalms 22 and 69 to demonstrate that it “fulfills” texts that spoke of an innocent sufferer vindicated by God.

V. Mark’s mysterious ending (16:1–8) is actually an opening to readers, both ancient and modern.
   A. The failure to relate appearance accounts keeps “you will see him” as a constant possibility.
   B. For Mark’s readers, it is an invitation to “see him in Galilee” and, therefore, an invitation to find Jesus in the story Mark himself has composed.

Essential Reading:
The Gospel of Mark, 11–16.

Supplementary Reading:
F. J. Matera, The Kingship of Christ: Composition and Theology in Mark 15 (SBLDS 66; Chico: Scholars Press, 1982).

Questions to Consider:
1. By what means does Mark make the scandalous death of Jesus meaningful to readers?
2. How is the closing of Mark’s Gospel (in the shorter version) actually an opening to readers?
### Timeline

**B.C.E. (before the common era)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>323</td>
<td>Death of Alexander the Great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168</td>
<td>Roman domination of the Mediterranean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168</td>
<td>War of Maccabees against Antiochus IV Epiphanes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167</td>
<td>Book of Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Conquest of Palestine by Pompey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Augustus becomes Roman emperor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Judaea annexed as province by Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Birth of Jesus (probable)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**C.E. (common era)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ministry of John the Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Crucifixion of Jesus (probable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34/37</td>
<td>Conversion of Saul/Paul (probable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49–64</td>
<td>Active ministry and letters of Paul; period of oral transmission of the memory of Jesus; formation of Q?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Activity of Apollonius of Tyana (approximate); death of Philo Judaeus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Nero burns Rome; punishes Christians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Start of Jewish War against Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Death of Paul (and probably Peter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Destruction of Jerusalem Temple by Romans; probable composition of the Gospel of Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Gospel of John (probable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>First Letter of Clement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>The Didache (probable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122–135</td>
<td>Final Jewish Revolt against Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>135</td>
<td>Destruction of Jerusalem by Romans; Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>135/136</td>
<td>Valentinus in Rome; Gospel of Truth (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>Infancy Gospels of Thomas and James (probable); Greek original of the Sayings Gospel of Thomas (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>Martyrdom of Polycarp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156–170</td>
<td>Ministry of Montanus (approximate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>160</td>
<td>Death of Marcion of Sinope; composition of the Gospel of Peter (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>165</td>
<td>Martyrdom of Justin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>Death of Irenaeus of Lyons; publication of the Mishnah under Judah the Prince</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
215................................. Death of Clement of Alexandria
218................................. Philostratus writes *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*
225................................. Death of Tertullian
250................................. Composition of Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew (?)
254................................. Death of Origen
313................................. Edict of Milan
325................................. Council of Nicaea
367................................. Pachal Letter of Athanasius of Alexandria
397................................. Council of Carthage
500–700............................ Composition of further apocryphal Gospels
1773................................. Discovery of manuscript of Pistis Sophia
1783................................. *Gospel Parallels* published by J. J. Griesbach
1906................................. Publication of Schweitzer’s *Quest of the Historical Jesus*
1945–1946........................ Discovery of Gnostic codices at Nag Hammadi in Egypt
1947................................. Discovery of Dead Sea Scrolls at Wadi Qumran in Israel
1985................................. Formation of the Jesus Seminar
Glossary


**Apocalyptic**: A vision of history as tending toward a (divinely ordered) goal, often in two stages: A present age of oppression is to be followed by an age of triumph for the righteous (also: messianic age/resurrection of the just). The term is also attached to the literature containing such views.

**Apocryphal**: Either Jewish or Christian literature that was not included in canonical collections; not to be used for official functions but may be read for private edification or entertainment.

**Apostle**: From the Greek for “one sent out on a commission,” the term used in earliest Christianity for representatives of the risen Christ.

**Baptism**: The Christian ritual of initiation, carried out in public (probably) by means of immersion in water.

**Bridal chamber**: A term used in compositions from Nag Hammadi, most notably the Gospel of Philip. It appears to refer to a ritual act, but its precise meaning is uncertain.

**Canon**: The official collection of literature defining a religious tradition, regarded as authoritative and often as divinely inspired.

**Canonical**: Writings included in the collection of compositions that make up the Old and New Testaments—scripture.

**Chriism**: The Greek term means “anointing”; the term is used in the Gospel of Philip for one of the sacraments (confirmation?).

**Christ/Christianity**: The Hebrew term Messiah is translated into Greek as Christos (“anointed one”); Christianity is the religion in which Jesus the Christ is the central figure.

**Circumcision**: The Jewish initiation of males through removal of the foreskin of the penis, symbolizing acceptance of the obligation to observe Torah.

**Cognitive dissonance**: The condition in which there is a clash between an experience and a conviction (idea/symbol) or between two contradictory ideas.

**Coptic**: The Egyptian language written in Greek and demotic characters, used from the early Christian era; the language of the Nag Hammadi compositions.

**Covenant**: A binding treaty between two parties. In the biblical tradition, such treaties set out the terms of the relationship between the one God and the chosen people.

**Diaspora**: From the Greek, meaning “dispersion.” Any place Jews live outside of Palestine. In the 1st century, more Jews lived in the diaspora than in the land of Israel.

**Didache**: Short title for *The Teaching [Didache] of the Twelve Apostles*, an anonymous Christian writing, c. 100.

**Disciple/Discipleship**: This term translates the Greek mathetes, which means literally “a learner”; used for followers of Jesus in the Gospels.

**Docetism**: From the Greek dokein (“to appear,” “to seem”), the position that the humanity of Jesus was not real but only apparent.

**Doctrine**: The statement of authoritative teaching in a religious tradition, especially concerning matters of belief.

**Doxa**: A Greek noun that can mean “opinion” (as opposed to truth) but is used also to translate Kbd, thus, “glory.”

**Ebionites**: The name derives from the Hebrew word for “poor”; a group of Jewish Christians whose origins are legendarily connected to the original Jerusalem community.

**Ekklesia**: The Greek word for assembly or gathering that is used both by Jews and Christians in the diaspora but becomes the distinctive Christian self-designation of “church.”
**Eschatology**: Any understanding of the “end” of history; the term derives from the Greek *eschatos*, which means “last” or “end.”

**Essenes**: One of the sects of Judaism in 1st-century Palestine. Some members lived at Qumran, while others lived elsewhere. They were dedicated to a strict observance of Torah, especially in matters of purity.

**Eucharist**: From the Greek word for “thanksgiving,” the term used for the fellowship meals celebrated in the name of Jesus among early Christians.

**Formative Judaism** (also Classical Judaism, Rabbinic Judaism, Talmudic Judaism): The tradition of the Pharisees with the technical expertise of the Scribes that came to dominate Judaism after the fall of the temple in diaspora synagogues.

**Formgeschichte**: The German designation for “form criticism.”

**Gentile**: The term can be used equally for the “nations” other than Israel and for individuals who are not Jewish.

**Glossolalia**: One of the spiritual gifts in early Christianity, consisting of an ordered form of babbling; “speaking in tongues.”

**Gnosticism/Gnostic**: Terms used to designate groups from the 2nd century onward who claimed the name of Christian and understood it as a religion of enlightenment through saving knowledge.

**Gospel**: The term used for the Greek *euangelion* (“good news”), which in the beginning of Christianity, referred to the proclamation of God’s work in the death and resurrection of Jesus and later was used for a variety of literary works involving Jesus.

**Greco-Roman**: The cultural mix of the 1st-century Mediterranean world, in which Greek civilization continued to exercise influence under Roman political rule.

**Hellenism**: The cultural reality that resulted from Alexander the Great’s effort to universalize the classical Greek culture of Athens.

**Hermetic literature**: Works on revelation associated with Hermes; written in Greek and Latin in the 1st–3rd centuries C.E.

**Jewish-Christian**: A catchall term for any followers of Jesus who are not only ethnically Jewish (and practice circumcision) but who continue to have an allegiance to the observance of Torah, however understood.

**Lord’s Supper**: See Eucharist.

**Magic**: From one perspective, a term used to deprecate a religion not one’s own. From another perspective, a relationship to transcendent power that is fundamentally manipulative.

**Mantic prophecy**: A much-respected form of prophecy in Hellenism, because of the conviction that the divine spirit (*pneuma*) spoke through humans in a state called *enthusiasmos*, or *mania*.

**Merkabah mysticism**: A form of Jewish mysticism in which the heavenly “throne chariot” is the central symbol and involves the “ascent” to the divine presence. Closely aligned with apocalyptic visions. It is found in Hekaloth (“heavenly throne room”) literature.

**Midrash**: The practice of the interpretation of Torah among Jewish scholars (Scribes), in which ancient texts were contemporized. If legal texts are interpreted, it is halachic midrash; if non-legal, it is haggadic midrash.

**Mishnah**: The authoritative collection of Jewish law derived from Torah through midrash, compiled by Judah the Prince c. 200 C.E.

**Monotheism**: A belief distinctive to Judaism in antiquity—although some philosophers floundered toward it—that God was singular in existence, the one power that creates, sustains, and judges the world.

**Mysticism**: The element in a religion by which an individual seeks an unmediated experience of the divine through prayer or some other practice.

**Paraclete**: The Greek *parakletos* (“advocate”) is used by the Fourth Gospel for the Holy Spirit.
**Parousia**: Literally “arrived,” used for visits of royalty and, in the New Testament, for the “second coming” of Jesus.

**Patristic**: From the Greek for “father,” the designation for Christian literature (above all, orthodox Christian literature) from the time of the New Testament to the medieval period.

**Pharisee/Pharisaism**: One of the sects of Judaism in 1st-century Palestine, notable for its deep devotion to Torah and destined to become the main surviving rival to Christianity after the destruction of the temple. See also **Formative Judaism**.

**Pleroma**: From the Greek word for “fullness,” the complex inner world of the divine in some Gnostic speculation. Detachment from the Pleroma is the first disaster leading to the formation of the material world.

**Polytheism**: The religious system that thinks of the divine power as distributed among many gods and goddesses, often envisaged in terms of an extended family (for example, the Olympians).

**Proselytes**: In Greek, “those who have come over,” namely, converts to Judaism from among Gentiles.

**Pseudo-Clementine literature**: A complex body of writings all associated (pseudonymously) with Clement of Rome. Composed between the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E., they may contain some earlier traditions. As a whole, they exhibit a Jewish-Christian tendency.

**Quelle**: Conventionally, the designation *Q* for the hypothetical shared source of Matthew and Luke comes from this German word meaning “source.”

**Sadducees**: One of the 1st-century Jewish sects in Palestine, closely associated with the temple and the high-priestly aristocracy.

**Septuagint** (also LXX): The translation of the Torah into Greek carried out in Alexandria, c. 250 B.C.E.; the name comes from the tradition that 70 translators were involved.

**Son of Man**: The self-designation of Jesus in all four canonical Gospels. The Greek *hvios tou anthropou* is a wooden translation of a Hebrew or Aramaic original.

**Sophia**: The Greek word for “wisdom,” which in some Gnostic literature is personified as an element in the Pleroma and as a consort of Christ.

**Symbolic world**: Social structures and the symbols used to express and support such structures; roughly equivalent to “culture.”

**Syncretism**: The merging of religious traditions, specifically the fusion of polytheistic systems.

**Synoptic Gospels**: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, so called because they can be seen together (synopsis) when laid out in parallel columns. The complex ways in which these narratives agree and differ demands a solution of the *synoptic problem* that involves literary dependence.

**Talmud**: The final authoritative collection of Rabbinic lore, found in a Palestinian and Babylonian version, each completed before the 6th century C.E.

**Tanak**: The Jewish name for scripture, an acronym constructed from the three constitutive parts: Torah (the law of Moses), Nebiim (the prophets), and Ketubim (the writings).

**Theodicy**: A defense of God’s providence.

**Torah**: The central symbol of the Pharisaic tradition and Formative Judaism. In the narrowest sense, the five books of Moses; in a broader sense, all of scripture; in the broadest sense, all the lore and life derived from those texts.

**Zealots**: The Jewish sect in 1st-century Palestine that most strongly identified with the symbol of kingship and sought actively to overthrow Roman occupation.
Biographical Notes

Anna: According to the Protevangelium Jacobi, the mother of Mary and, therefore, the grandmother of Jesus.

Bartholomew: One of the more anonymous among the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus and, therefore, an ideal candidate to have an apocryphal work attributed to him: the Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–217): Head of the catechetical school at Alexandria, prolific author, and important source for our knowledge of early Gnostics, as well as Jewish-Christian Gospels, especially in his Stromateis.

Clement of Rome (c. 96): An elder of the church in Rome and author of a letter to the church at Corinth; one of our early sources of knowledge about the process of canonization.

Elizabeth: According to the Gospel of Luke, the mother of John the Baptist and kinswoman of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Heracleon: A 2nd-century Gnostic teacher and an important interpreter of the Gospel of John, quoted extensively by Origen in his Commentary on John.

Herod: Four members of this Idumaean family who served as kings under Roman authority enter the Gospel accounts: Herod the Great was appointed king of the Jews and ruled from 37 B.C.E. to 4 B.C.E.; he is the Herod of Matt. 2:16. Herod Antipas, his son (4 B.C.E.–39 C.E.), is Herod the Tetrarch who ruled in Galilee (Luke 3:1) and beheaded John the Baptist. Agrippa I is the Herod who kills James in Acts 12:1 and himself dies a terrible death; he is the nephew of Antipas and ruled from 37–44 C.E. Finally, his son, Agrippa II, is King Agrippa, before whom Paul appears on trial in Acts 25:13.

Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–107): The seven letters he wrote to churches while crossing Asia Minor as a prisoner on his way to being martyred at Rome are important sources for knowledge of Christianity in the early 2nd century, especially as battling Jewish Christian manifestations on one side and Docetic elements on the other.

Irenaeus of Lyons (130–200 C.E.): His five-book treatise, Against Heresies, is a leading source of knowledge concerning Gnosticism, especially of the Valentinian type. The entire first book is taken up with a description of the Gnostic system.

James: There are many figures with this name in the New Testament. The most significant is the “Brother of the Lord” (so called by Paul), who was head of the church in Jerusalem after Peter (see Acts 15) and who may have written the New Testament Letter of James. The Infancy Gospel of James is certainly not by him. In the 3rd century, James of Jerusalem is a hero in some portions of the pseudo-Clementine literature, which is also hostile to the apostle Paul.

Jesus of Nazareth (c.4 B.C.E.–30 C.E.): The figure on whom all the Gospel literature centers was a Jew from Nazareth in Galilee who exercised a prophetic ministry among his fellow Jews, gained a following for his teaching and wonderworking, met opposition from religious and political leaders, and was executed by Roman authority. After his death, his followers proclaimed him as Lord and spread the “good news” of his powerful presence among them.

Joachim: According to the Protevangelium Jacobi, the father of Mary and, therefore, the grandfather of Jesus.

John the Baptist: A figure of 1st-century Palestine sufficiently significant to be described in his ministry and death by the historian Josephus. According to the Gospel of Luke, a cousin of Jesus, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and member of a priestly family from the hill country of Galilee, who proclaimed a coming kingdom of God and a baptism of repentance from sins. The Gospels portray him as the forerunner of the Messiah, the “Elijah” prophesied by Malachi. He was beheaded by Herod the Tetrarch, possibly in 28–29 C.E.

John the Evangelist: Nothing is known about the author of the Fourth Gospel, but he is associated with the “Beloved Disciple” of that narrative, the “Elder” who is the writer of 1 and 2 John, and the “Seer” of the Book of Revelation.

Joseph: The human father of Jesus (Luke says, “as it was thought”). In the Gospel of Luke, Joseph accompanies and supports Mary, but she is the hero of that account. In Matthew, Joseph emerges as the “Son of David” to whom God’s plan is revealed and who acts to save the child. Given that the Gospels do not mention Joseph after the
account in Luke concerning the loss of the child in the temple, he may have died before Jesus began his ministry. It is only in the Infancy Gospel of James that Joseph appears as an older man with children who takes Mary as his wife/ward; in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, he appears as a befuddled and frightened stepfather.

**Justin** (c. 100–165): One of Christianity’s first and greatest apologists, an opponent of the heretic Marcion. His *Dialogue with Trypho* is our best source for Jewish-Christian conditions in the mid-2nd century, and Justin’s *Apology* shows knowledge of Gnostic teachers.

**Lazarus**: One of the few named characters in the Gospels, according to the Gospel of John, the brother of Martha and Mary, friends of Jesus. Jesus raised him from the tomb (John 11).

**Luke the Evangelist**: According to tradition, a companion of Paul and a physician. He may well have been a companion of Paul, who is a hero of Acts, but apart from the two-volume work (Luke-Acts) ascribed to him, we really know nothing more about him.

**Marcion of Sinope** (d. 160): An influential 2nd-century teacher with a sharply dualistic view: Materiality is evil, spirit is good, and Jesus delivers humans from the creator God of the Old Testament. These views resemble Gnosticism, but the exact relationship is uncertain. Marcion influenced the development of the canon by his efforts to reduce the traditional collection.

**Mark the Evangelist**: Nothing is known of the creator of the gospel genre, but according to Papias (a not very reliable 2nd-century writer), Mark drew his Gospel from the preaching of Peter in Rome. Present-day scholars see him as a writer of considerable artistry, despite his inelegant Greek.

**Martha**: With her sister Mary, she appears in both the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of John as a friend of Jesus.

**Mary, the Mother of Jesus**: In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, she appears in the infancy accounts—in Luke, she is the main figure—as Jesus’s mother. In both the Synoptics and John, she appears among the followers of Jesus. In John, she is with Jesus at the cross. In Acts, she is among those who receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, the entire focus is on Mary and her purity, and in the Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, Mary and Jesus have a relationship that tends to exclude Joseph.

**Mary Magdalen (of Magdala)**: Tradition has assimilated this important witness of the resurrection to the figures of Mary (the friend of Jesus) and Luke’s sinful woman. But in both John and the Synoptics, it is her role as witness to the resurrection that is most significant. In some Gnostic writings, Mary plays a role superior to that of some male disciples (see the Gospel of Mary), and some suggest a level of physical and spiritual intimacy between Jesus and Mary (see the Gospel of Philip).

**Matthew the Evangelist**: There is a Matthew among the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus, and those who favor this Gospel as the first written see it as an eyewitness account. But like the other Gospels, Matthew shows the signs of slow development of tradition and careful redaction of earlier sources.

**Nicodemus**: One of the named characters in the Fourth Gospel, the one who “comes to Jesus by night,” (ch. 3) and brings ointment for his burial (ch. 19). A late apocryphal work is called the Gospel of Nicodemus.

**Origen of Alexandria** (184–254 C.E.): The successor to Clement in the Alexandrian catechetical school and one of the greatest theologians and interpreters of scripture in the history of Christianity, influencing all who followed. Despite sharing, with Clement, a strongly intellectual approach to the faith, he constantly repudiated the teachings of the Gnostics and adhered to the Rule of Faith handed down by tradition.

**Paul** (d. c. 64 C.E.): Born Saul of Tarsus in Cilicia, according to Acts, Paul was a Roman citizen by birth and a student of Gamaliel in Jerusalem. First a persecutor of the Christian movement, he encountered the risen Jesus (c. 34/37) and became an apostle, establishing churches throughout Asia Minor and Greece. He has 13 letters ascribed to him in the New Testament. He was martyred under Nero, c. 64.

**Peter** (d. c. 64 C.E.): According to all the Gospels, the chief spokesperson among Jesus’s chosen followers and, according to Acts, the leader of the first church in Jerusalem and the first to convert a Gentile. Among a number of other apocryphal works associated with him is the Gospel of Peter.

**Philip**: One of the 12, who appears as an especially prominent disciple of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, one of those who question Jesus at the last supper. He has an apocryphal gospel, the Gospel of Philip, ascribed to him.
Polycarp (c. 69–155): Bishop of Smyrna to whom Ignatius of Antioch wrote in his journey across Asia Minor and himself the author of a pastoral letter. He apparently knew and condemned Marcion and died as a martyr.

Pontius Pilate: The Roman prefect of Judaea from 26–36 C.E., under whom Jesus was crucified. The hearing before him is a climax in all the passion accounts but is expanded particularly in Matthew (where Pilate’s wife makes an appearance) and in John (where Jesus and Pilate have an extended exchange). He is the classic candidate for “filling the gaps” in the narrative through apocryphal works, and an entire Pilate cycle of writings is extant.

Ptolemy: Gnostic teacher of the 2nd century whose Letter to Flora is our earliest example of a serious hermeneutical theory regarding the Christian interpretation of scripture.

Tertullian (160–225): A great apologist for Christianity and opponent of heretics, especially Marcion, for whom he is our most important source, this rigorist North African eventually joined the Montanist movement.

Thomas: One of the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus who emerges as a singular character in the Fourth Gospel, whose doubt occasioned a separate resurrection appearance. A number of apocryphal works are associated with him, including the Infancy Gospel of Thomas and the Coptic Gospel of Thomas.

Valentinus: A 2nd-century Gnostic teacher who taught at Rome from 136–165 and had hopes of being elected bishop. Passed over for that position, he seceded from the church and probably ended up in Cyprus. Possibly the author of the Gospel of Truth, Valentinus had many significant disciples, including Theodotus, Ptolemy, and Heracleon. It is his mythic system that Irenaeus reports in the first book of Against Heresies.

Zechariah: According to the Gospel of Luke, a member of the priestly order of Abijah and the father of John the Baptist.
Bibliography

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:


Crossan, J. D. *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988. The prolific and provocative leader of the Jesus Seminar argues that the Gospel of Peter represents an independent witness to the resurrection and to the process by which the evangelists constructed history out of prophecy.

———. *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991. One of the most thorough, methodologically consistent, and interesting of the contemporary efforts to construct a usable Jesus; Crossan is candid about his techniques and purposes.


Dibelius, M. *From Tradition to Gospel*. Translated by R. Woolf. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934. With R. Bultmann, one of the founders of New Testament form criticism, Dibelius emphasized the social contexts within which the memory of Jesus was selected and shaped by oral tradition.


Harnack, A. *History of Dogma*, vol. 1. Translated by N. Buchanan. Theological Translation Library; London: Williams and Norgate, 1905. This is the classic statement concerning the origins of Gnosticism as the “acute Hellenization of Christianity,” based on the available texts before Nag Hammadi.


History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel, rev. ed. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979. An extremely influential study of John that argues for the historical setting of separation from the synagogue as the factor that shapes the symbolism of the narrative.


———. “The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,” Journal of Biblical Literature 91 (1972): 44–72. An essay that has shaped all subsequent study of John, arguing that the literary technique of irony used by the author of John serves to accentuate the distance between insider and outsider.

Meier, J. P. A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. 3 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1991, 1994. Perhaps the most ambitious effort at reconstructing the historical Jesus ever undertaken; still unfinished, these three volumes are marked by careful analysis and comprehensive scholarship.

———. Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel: A Redactional Study of 5:17–48. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976. Before Meier turned to historical Jesus research, he was a leading scholar on Matthew; this study takes on the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, showing its distinctive Matthean traits.


Patterson, S. J. The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus. Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1993. A good representative of the position that the Coptic Gospel found at Nag Hammadi contains sayings as old as those found in the canonical Gospels and, therefore, is a primary source for reconstructing the teaching of Jesus.


Perrin, N. What Is Redaction Criticism? Guides to Biblical Study; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969. A leading proponent of this method of studying the Gospels demonstrates its usefulness when applied to the section of Mark following the confession of Peter.


Schweitzer, A. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. Translated by W. Montgomery. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998. This is a reprint of the classic 1906 study that interpreted—and, in some respects, invented—the first “quest” in critical scholarship (especially German scholarship).


Tuckett, C. M. *Nag Hammadi and the Gospel Tradition*. Edited by John Riches. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986. A careful examination of the claims made for the originality of the Jesus traditions in the Nag Hammadi texts, concluding that there is a strong probability for dependence on the canonical Gospels.


Jesus and the Gospels
Part II

Professor Luke Timothy Johnson
Luke Timothy Johnson, Ph.D.
Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins, Emory University

Luke Timothy Johnson is the Robert W. Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia. Born in 1943 and from the ages of 19 to 28 a Benedictine monk, Dr. Johnson received a B.A. in philosophy from Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, an M.Div. in theology from Saint Meinrad School of Theology in Indiana, and an M.A. in religious studies from Indiana University, before earning his Ph.D. in New Testament from Yale University in 1976.

Professor Johnson taught at Yale Divinity School from 1976 to 1982 and at Indiana University from 1982 to 1992 before accepting his current position at Emory. He is the author of 20 books, including *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (2nd edition, 1999), which is used widely as a textbook in seminaries and colleges. He has also published several hundred articles and reviews. His most recent publications are: *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* and *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*. He is working on a study of the influence of Greco-Roman religion on Christianity.

Professor Johnson has taught undergraduates, as well as master’s level and doctoral students. At Indiana University, he received the President’s Award for Distinguished Teaching, was elected a member of the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching, and won the Brown Derby and Student Choice Awards for teaching. At Emory, he has twice received the “On Eagle’s Wings Excellence in Teaching” Award. In 1997–1998, he was a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar, speaking at college campuses across the country.

Professor Johnson is married to Joy Randazzo. They share 7 children, 12 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren. Johnson also teaches the courses called *The Apostle Paul*, *Early Christianity: The Experience of the Divine*, *Practical Philosophy: The Greco-Roman Moralists*, and *Christianity* in Great World Religions for The Teaching Company.

©2004 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
# Table of Contents

**Jesus and the Gospels**

**Part II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professor Biography</th>
<th>............................................................................................</th>
<th>i</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course Scope</td>
<td>............................................................................................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Thirteen</td>
<td>Gospel of Matthew—Synagogue Down the Street</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Fourteen</td>
<td>Gospel of Matthew—The Messiah of Israel</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Fifteen</td>
<td>Gospel of Matthew—Jesus and Torah</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Sixteen</td>
<td>Gospel of Matthew—Teacher and Lord</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Eighteen</td>
<td>Gospel of Luke—God’s Prophet</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Nineteen</td>
<td>Gospel of Luke—The Prophet and the People</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Twenty</td>
<td>Acts of the Apostles—The Prophet’s Movement</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Twenty-One</td>
<td>Gospel of John—Context of Conflict</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Twenty-Two</td>
<td>Gospel of John—Jesus as the Man From Heaven</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Twenty-Three</td>
<td>Gospel of John—Jesus as Obedient Son</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Twenty-Four</td>
<td>Gospel of John—Witness to the Truth</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>............................................................................................</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>............................................................................................</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biographical Notes</td>
<td>............................................................................................</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>............................................................................................</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jesus and the Gospels

Scope:

Early Christianity was prolific in its production of Gospels—narratives that in one way or another have Jesus of Nazareth as their central character. There are many more Gospels than the four included in the New Testament. They are almost bewilderingly diverse in the way they portray Jesus.

The Gospels are fascinating literary compositions in their own right, and they raise puzzling questions about the figure they portray and about the religious movement, Christianity, that produced them. What accounts for the diversity of images? Is it possible to speak of a single Jesus when accounts about him are so various?

The most common approach to these questions is through history. The so-called “quest for the historical Jesus” asks who the human Jesus really was behind all the different portraits. One example of that quest is offered in the Teaching Company course called The Historical Jesus.

Although the historical question is legitimate and even compelling, it is also virtually impossible to answer satisfactorily. Certainly some historical statements can be made about the human Jesus that meet the strictest criteria of historical method. But such statements fall far short of providing a full or even meaningful grasp of Jesus’s identity. Worse, such historical efforts treat the actual Gospels shabbily. The literary effect of the compositions tends to be completely ignored, while the materials in them that are deemed authentic are ripped out of their literary contexts to be placed in the historian’s reconstruction.

The approach to Jesus and the Gospels taken in this course is not primarily historical but literary. Of course, history comes into play as we place the various Gospels within the development of Christianity. Our search, however, is not for the figure behind the Gospels but for the even more fascinating figure in them. Only after the full range of these literary representations has been considered can the question of “the real Jesus” adequately be posed—and it may not be answerable in strictly historical terms.

Our focus, in short, is not simply on Jesus but also on the Gospels as literary compositions. We want to know how they came to be, how they are related to one another, and how they communicate through their literary structure, plot, character development, themes, and symbolism. It is, after all, as literature that the Gospels influenced history. And it is through literature that present-day readers can continue to encounter Jesus.

The opening lectures set the context for the emergence of the Gospels as distinctive literary expressions: the historical, cultural, and experiential matrix in which Jesus traditions were selected and shaped by early Christian communities. Then, we consider the conditions that required a shift from oral tradition to written composition and the literary relations among the synoptic Gospels.

The four canonical Gospels (those found in the New Testament) of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John are next examined in considerable detail, precisely as literary expressions that witness to and interpret the Christian community’s convictions concerning Jesus. For each Gospel, we consider not only what is being said but also how it is being said. Such attention is appropriate both because of the literary richness of the canonical Gospels and because theirs are the portrayals of Jesus that have exercised the most influence through history.

We turn next to the wide range of apocryphal Gospels (those not found in the New Testament), including the intriguing infancy Gospels of James and Thomas, fragments from lost narrative Gospels deriving from Jewish Christian circles, and finally, the various compositions usually associated with Gnosticism that in one way or another can be considered Gospels.

The final lectures consider the illusive and compelling figure of Jesus, both as he is found in his diverse literary representations and as he is experienced in communities of faith that read the Gospels in the context of worship.

Material from Documents for the Study of the Gospels edited by David R. Cartlidge and David L. Dungan, is reproduced with permission from Augsburg Fortress, Publishers (Minneapolis, MN).

Material from The Nag Hammadi Library in English, 2nd Edition by James M. Robinson, is reproduced with permission from Brill Academic Publishers.
Lecture Thirteen

Gospel of Matthew—Synagogue Down the Street

Scope: Because Matthew uses Mark’s Gospel in constructing his own version of the good news, it is possible to deduce with considerable confidence, from his redaction of Mark as well as material he adds to Mark, his own compositional interests. His portrayal of Jesus as a teacher and as the fulfillment of Torah, together with his interest in instructing the messianic community in the proper understanding of Torah and, finally, his polemic against the leaders of formative Judaism, all point to a context of competition and conversation with Pharisaic Judaism in the period after the Jewish War.

Outline

I. Because Matthew uses Mark’s Gospel as one of its main sources, it provides the best example of how redaction criticism can illuminate the setting and purpose of a Gospel.
   A. Matthew’s extensive use of Mark suggests a basic approval of Mark’s form of the “good news.”
      1. Matthew retains the basic plot line from baptism to burial.
      2. In particular, Matthew retains the emphasis on Jesus as the suffering Son of Man (see the passion predictions).
      3. Matthew’s passion narrative follows Mark’s closely but emphasizes the identity of Jesus as God’s Son and the responsibility of the entire Jewish populace for the death of Jesus (27:25).
   B. Although Matthew consistently shortens Mark’s diffuse version of stories, requiring a third fewer words to tell the same story (compare Matt 8:28–34 and Mark 5:1–20), he increases the length of the overall narrative with two important additions that also serve to frame the story.
      1. The genealogy and infancy account (chs. 1–2) serve to connect Jesus more firmly with the story of Israel.
      2. The explicit resurrection appearances and final commission (28:9–10, 16–20) serve to connect Jesus more closely to the church.
   C. Matthew more fundamentally alters the character of Mark’s narrative by the addition of substantial discourse material drawn from Q and M; Jesus is not only called teacher, but he teaches extensively by means of long speeches.

II. The structural arrangements that Matthew introduces suggest something about the possible social setting of the Gospel.
   A. Matthew interjects two important narrative transitions in 4:17 and 16:21, which provide a broad narrative structure: the identity of Jesus the Messiah (1:1–4:16), the preaching of the Messiah (4:17–16:20), and the teaching of the Messiah (16:21–28:20). That these transitions are hard to spot shows that Matthew is less preoccupied than Mark with the story as such.
   B. More impressive are the transitions from discourses to narrative (7:28–29; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), which have the effect of creating five great discourses.
      1. The discourses are created by the evangelist out of Q and M materials—they are distributed by Luke differently.
      2. They are internally organized and topically distributed (thus, the parables in ch. 13 and eschatology in chs. 24–25).
      3. The effect of this editing is to create the impression of “five discourses” that roughly correspond to the “five books of Moses.”
   C. Matthew uses bracketing (inclusio) as an organizational principle within discourses and as a means of framing his Gospel as a whole (see 1:23 and 28:20).
   D. A consistent (and distinctive) feature of Matthew’s Gospel is the frequent use of scriptural citations introduced by set formulas (“this happened in order to fulfill the saying of the prophet”).
      1. Such interjections represent authorial commentary on the story being told—a “telling” as well as a “showing.”
2. The application of Torah to every detail of the Messiah’s existence demonstrates the author’s concern that Jesus be seen as “according to scripture.”

E. The combination of redactional features suggests that the most plausible setting for Matthew’s Gospel is one in which “teachers of Torah” are important.

III. Matthew’s Gospel is composed in the context of conflict and conversation with formative Judaism in the late 1st century, the “synagogue down the street.”

A. Formative Judaism designates the Talmudic or Pharisaic tradition as it came into definitive shape after the destruction of the temple (70 C.E.).
   1. Based on the religious convictions of the Pharisees and the professional skill of the Scribes, it was the form of Judaism sufficiently adaptable and mobile to survive the catastrophe that was the war with Rome.
   2. In the synagogues of the diaspora, the Pharisaic ideals took hold: The observance of Torah was the fulfillment of covenant and the measure of wisdom; the study of Torah was as important as the keeping of the commandments.
   3. This formative Judaism was precisely centered in teaching and in Torah.

B. For a community like Matthew’s, being expelled from the synagogue for the confession of Jesus as Messiah would have involved a complex process of separation and appropriation.
   1. As the reason why they were separated from the synagogue, Jesus would more than ever be the central symbol for the members of the Matthean community.
   2. Jesus would also, thereby, gather to himself the symbols that the synagogue down the street used to express its identity.

Essential Reading:
The Gospel of Matthew.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What aspects of Matthew’s Gospel support the suggestion that it is composed in the context of controversy with the Pharisaic tradition?
2. How does Matthew’s addition of narrative material at either end of his Markan source serve to frame and interpret his story?
Lecture Fourteen
Gospel of Matthew—The Messiah of Israel

Scope: Matthew is concerned to show that Jesus is truly the Messiah of Israel, the one spoken of by the prophets. One manifestation of this concern is the genealogy with which his Gospel opens and his infancy account—a feature shared with Luke's Gospel but with no shared narrative elements—which locate Jesus within the story of Israel. Also illustrative of this concern is his use of explicit scriptural citations (often introduced by set formulas) that serve to prove that Jesus fulfills the prophecies, from his birth to his death.

Outline

I. The opening of Matthew’s Gospel establishes Jesus’s identity as Son of David and Son of God (chs. 1–2).
   A. The genealogy imitates a literary feature of Torah (the toledoth) and connects Jesus to the family of Abraham.
      1. Matthew’s genealogy is different from Luke’s in structure, placement, and emphasis.
      2. Jesus is descended from Abraham and is the Son of David.
      3. Matthew’s inclusion of women in the genealogy points to the role of Mary: Each woman (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah—Bathsheba) represents a certain degree of foreignness and has something sexually suspect in her history; this hints at the sexual ambiguity of the birth of Jesus through Mary.
   B. In Matthew’s infancy account, Joseph, rather than Mary, is the main figure.
      1. It is noteworthy that the standard Christmas story represents an amalgam of the infancy accounts of Matthew and Luke, which are very different from each other.
      2. Matthew’s use of formula citations places all the events under the umbrella of Torah (1:23, 2:6, 2:15, 2:18, 2:22). For example, Matthew recalls that the prophet Micah (Matthew 2:6) prophesized that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Matthew’s applications of these prophetic texts are made ex post factum.
      3. Of particular significance is the citation from Hosea 11:1 (2:15), which identifies Jesus as “Son of God” within the tradition of Torah. Although there are nuances of divinity in Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus (as there are in Mark’s), Matthew’s reference to Jesus as God’s Son here is most likely to be a personification of Israel. Israel was taken out of Egypt and called “my son.” Thus, Jesus, as a representative of the best of what God looked for in Israel—the obedient one—comes to be called “Son of God.”

II. The beginning of Jesus’s ministry shows Jesus to have a unique relationship to God and, therefore, a unique authority to teach.
   A. Matthew expands the role given to John the Baptist who, like Jesus, proclaims “the kingdom of heaven.”
      1. A consistent emphasis in Matthew is that to be an authentic child of Abraham, you must do the works of repentance.
      2. John preaches to the people and threatens them with eschatological judgment (3:4–12).
      3. Jesus’s baptism by John is a fulfillment of “all righteousness” (3:15).
      4. Jesus later explicitly identifies John the Baptist as the expected Elijah (17:9–11).
   B. Matthew opens up the baptism scene, making it a public proclamation by God that Jesus is God’s beloved Son (3:16–17).
   C. Matthew uses Q material to expand the account of Jesus’s sojourn in the desert.
      1. Jesus experiences three testings presented to him as “Son of God” to be a Messiah according to ordinary human expectations.
      2. Matthew shows Jesus as radically obedient to God’s words as expressed in Torah and, therefore, capable of interpreting Torah.
   D. An aspect of Matthew’s hostility to Jewish rivals is the way he has the taunts from the crowd at the crucifixion of Jesus echo the temptations presented Jesus by the devil (27:40, 43).
III. Matthew follows Mark’s account of Jesus’s ministry fairly closely but with some interesting twists.

A. Matthew is fond of doublets, keeping Mark’s (see the double feeding of the multitude) and adding some of his own: Jesus heals two Gerasene demoniacs (9:28–34) and two blind men—twice! (9:27–31; 20:29–34).

B. Matthew uses the formula citations to show that every aspect of Jesus’s life and ministry is in fulfillment of Torah.
   1. Jesus’s preaching fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 8:23 (4:14).
   2. Jesus’s acts of healing point to him as the fulfillment of the suffering servant predicted by Isaiah 53:4 (8:17) and Isaiah 42:1–4 (12:15–21).
   4. Jesus’s royal entry into Jerusalem fulfills (literally) the prophecies of Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9 (21:5).
   5. Even Jesus’s betrayal by Judas is in fulfillment of a (combined) prophecy from Jeremiah 18:2–3; 32:6–9 and Zechariah 11:12–13 (27:9–10).

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What is the effect of Matthew’s shaping of the baptism and temptation account on his portrait of Jesus?
2. How do the “formula citations” represent Matthew’s authorial commentary on his own narrative?
Lecture Fifteen
Gospel of Matthew—Jesus and Torah

Scope: Matthew’s Gospel not only shows that Jesus’s life fulfills messianic expectations as expressed in Torah, but it also shows Jesus as the definitive interpreter of Torah, as shown in his Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5–7), in his controversy stories, and in his sustained attack on rival Jewish teachers, the Scribes and Pharisees (ch. 23). Most strikingly, Matthew uses the symbols that were attached to Torah in formative Judaism to suggest that Jesus is the very personification of Torah.

Outline
I. Matthew’s Gospel is often thought of as “more Jewish,” but it is actually simply more Pharisaic in its tone and concerns.
   A. The ideals of the Pharisees and the skills of the Scribes came together after the fall of the temple to form the Judaism that would be “classical” for two millennia and, therefore, most familiar to readers today as “Jewish,” but it is simply the survivor among rival groups.
   B. The Pharisees centered themselves not in the temple (as the Sadducees did) or in the kingship (as the Zealots did) or in the purity of the land (as the Essenes did) but in the perfect observance of Torah.
      1. They considered all Israelites to be “priests” and, therefore, obligated to obey all the commands given to priests.
      2. Righteousness is measured by the faithful observance of God’s will as expressed in the commandments. Each word of Torah is holy and normative.
      3. Christians made a distinction between moral commandments and ritual commandments. This is contrary to the Pharisaic spirit.
      4. To observe the commandments in changing circumstances, however, a means of interpretation is required to contemporize the ancient texts (midrash).
   C. Within what became the “Rabbinic tradition,” Torah took on a number of symbolic associations.
      1. Torah expresses the mind of God and is the blueprint for creation; when revealed on Mt. Sinai, it restores the “image of God” to humanity.
      2. Torah is, therefore, both eternal and present to humans. It is indeed the mediator of God’s presence (shekinah).
      3. Studying the laws concerning sacrifice is as good as (or even better than) the actual sacrifices carried out in the temple.
      4. Torah is wisdom, and taking its yoke (as in observing Sabbath) is both freedom and rest.

II. There are obvious ways in which Matthew has Jesus inhabit the world of Torah in a way distinctive to his Gospel.
   A. Every moment of Jesus’s existence fulfills the prophecies of Torah (see previous lecture).
   B. Jesus is the authoritative and definitive interpreter of Torah for Israel.
      1. Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5–7) shows Jesus as revealing God’s will for those who want to belong to “the kingdom of Heaven.” The programmatic statement of 5:17–20 and the antitheses of 5:21–48 are particularly revealing of “the messianic interpreter.”
   C. In chapter 23, Matthew has Jesus attack the Scribes and Pharisees with a sustained polemic.
      1. Note the placement of the passage between the series of controversies with Jewish leaders in chapter 22 and the eschatological discourse to insiders in chapters 24–25.
      2. Matthew uses the conventional polemic used for attack among Hellenistic and Jewish rival schools to diminish the authority of opponents.
III. Most impressively, Matthew artfully suggests that Jesus even personifies Torah, making it possible to declare that Jesus is “Torah made human.”

A. In Jesus’s interpretation of Torah, his use of the first-person singular, “but I say to you,” is not only unprecedented in Judaism but asserts an authority equal to the God who revealed Torah. Likewise, Jesus, as was done in ancient wisdom, tells the wealthy man to find perfection by selling all and following him.

B. Matthew has Jesus compare himself favorably to the temple (12:6), the prophet Jonah (12:41), and Solomon (12:42).

C. In subtle fashion, Matthew uses the symbolic associations of Torah in connection with Jesus:
   1. Jesus is wisdom personified (11:19; 23:34).
   2. Jesus’s words will never pass away (5:18; 24:35).
   3. Jesus is the Sabbath rest for those who take his yoke (11:28–30).
   4. Jesus is present to those gathered in his name (18:20).
   5. Jesus remains with his followers forever (28:20).

Essential Reading:
The Gospel of Matthew, 5–7 and 23.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Why is it more accurate to speak of “Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount” than to speak of “Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount”?
2. Why is the polemic in Matthew 23 important for understanding the context of the Gospel but problematic for Jewish-Christian relations?
Lecture Sixteen
Gospel of Matthew—Teacher and Lord

Scope: The characteristic image of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel is that of the teacher. Yet Matthew’s careful redaction of Mark’s use of the titles “Teacher” and “Lord” as applied to Jesus shows that Jesus is understood as the risen Lord who teaches the church. No Gospel gives such explicit attention to the instruction of the church as such (see especially chapters 10 and 18). To this image of Jesus corresponds the portrayal of the disciples. As in Mark, they are morally inadequate (especially their spokesperson Peter), but because they are to “teach all that [Jesus] has commanded,” they are portrayed as intelligent and understanding students.

Outline

I. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is not just another teacher or rabbi but teaches as the risen Lord of the church.
   A. “Teacher” (didaskalos) can be applied to any human being who instructs; in early Christianity, “lord” (kyrios) is the title used for Jesus in virtue of the resurrection.
   B. In Mark’s Gospel, no real distinction is drawn between the titles; Jesus is called teacher frequently and by everyone: disciples, the needy, and enemies.
   C. Matthew edits Mark with great care to provide a different perspective.
      1. Only outsiders designate Jesus as teacher or rabbi, and only insiders call Jesus “lord.”
      2. The exceptions to this practice prove the rule (see 23:8–10; 26:25, 49).
      3. A telling exception has to do with the “insider” Judas who, at the last supper and in the garden, calls Jesus “rabbi” rather than the expected “lord.”
   D. The significance of this redactional activity is that Jesus teaches in Matthew’s Gospel with the authority of the risen Lord, not with merely human authority as another rabbi.

II. Matthew’s discourses provide genuine teaching for the church that gathers in the name of Jesus.
   A. Matthew’s is the only Gospel that explicitly uses the term “church” (ekklesia) during the ministry of Jesus (16:18; 18:17).
   B. Three dimensions of life in the church emerge from Matthew’s discourses.
      1. The Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5–7) and the “missionary discourse” (ch. 10) portray following Jesus in terms of a life of radical simplicity, integrity, and courage. For example, Matthew opposes Jesus’s understanding of piety (as a private matter) to the caricature of the Pharisees, who do good works ostentatiously in order to be perceived as pious. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel is not Jesus’s sermon, but one that has been constructed by Matthew. Nevertheless, it is considered to be a masterly portrayal of what Jesus was about. In chapter 10, the 12 disciples must go out in poverty to teach the Gospel. Their fate will be the same as that of Jesus.
      2. The ideals of humility and mutual service within the community are prescribed by Jesus in the discourse of chapter 18. The ideal of a community in service to children is presented. There must be mutual correction and forgiveness in this community.
      3. The church is depicted as a mixed community of the perfect and the imperfect and as a community that stands under God’s judgment in Matthew’s parable discourse (ch. 13) and eschatological discourse (chs. 24–25). Matthew’s entire Gospel is about action rather than words—doing the works of repentance.

III. The more positive portrayal of the disciples in Matthew corresponds to his portrayal of Jesus as the teacher of the church.
   A. In Mark, the disciples were not only lacking in insight, but they were morally deficient. They neither understood nor were loyal to Jesus.
   B. In Matthew, the “twelve disciples” (10:1; 11:1; 20:17) are also morally defective, but they are intelligent.
      1. Jesus calls them “men of little faith” (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8), and they fail Jesus in his passion (26:56) and even when he is resurrected (28:17).
2. But Matthew softens Mark’s harsher characterizations (8:23–27; 9:18–26; 17:1–8), and the disciples “understand” the parables (13:10–17) and are capable of teaching others (13:51–52).

3. The portrait of Peter corresponds to this distinction. On one side, Peter has the deepest insight into the identity of Jesus and is given authority over the church (16:16–19). On the other side, his betrayal is all the more grievous (26:69–75; see 5:34).

C. The disciples in Matthew need to be more intelligent and understanding, because their great commission demands not only baptizing all nations, but “teaching everything that I have commanded you” (28:20).

IV. In the history of Christianity, Matthew’s Gospel has been preeminently the “Gospel of the church” in two ways.

A. It has enjoyed more liturgical usage than the other Gospels and has been given more attention by commentators and preachers.

B. This heavy ecclesial use is no doubt due to the fact that Matthew is crafted so consciously to be useful to the messianic congregation.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What difference would it make to Matthew’s first readers to have Jesus designated as “lord” and not simply as “rabbi/teacher”?
2. How does the role of Peter in Matthew’s Gospel exemplify the Gospel’s complex presentation of discipleship?
Lecture Seventeen


Scope: The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles form a single literary composition in two volumes that can properly be called, “Luke’s Gospel.” Although the first volume concerns Jesus and the second volume, the early church, Jesus continues as a character and Luke portrays the church as continuing Jesus’s work. This presentation discusses the implications of reading the two volumes as a single work, with particular attention to the way in which Luke uses geography and prophecy as literary devices.

Outline

   A. The Gospel of Luke (the first volume) tells the story of Jesus by using Mark as his main narrative source and discourse material from Q and L.
      1. Like Matthew, Luke follows the Markan storyline from baptism to burial, but Luke follows Mark even more closely than Matthew, altering Mark’s language mainly for correctness and clarity.
      2. Luke omits a substantial portion of Mark’s middle section (Mark 6:45–8:26), probably out of a dislike for doublets and a concern for the portrayal of Jesus and the disciples.
      3. Luke adds narrative material at the beginning with infancy accounts (chs. 1–2) and at the end with several appearance stories and an account of the ascension (ch. 24).
      4. Luke adds a substantial amount of Q material (shared with Matthew) and L material, most notably, the distinctive Lukan parables.
      5. Luke exploits a narrative seam in Mark—Jesus’s journey to Jerusalem—and expands it to include the bulk of his discourse material (Luke 9–19).
      6. Luke adds a prologue to each of his volumes, that in the Gospel (1:1–4) being the most significant.
   B. The Acts of the Apostles (the second volume) tells the story of the early church, with special attention to Peter (chs. 1–12) and Paul (chs. 13–28).
      1. Luke appears to be the first to undertake this narrative; if he had written sources, they are undetectable.
      2. He therefore had greater freedom in the construction of the narrative, and like Hellenistic historians, used journeys, speeches, and summaries, to flesh out the few facts available to him.
   C. The genre that best fits Luke-Acts as a whole is that of history, but it is important to recognize that the volumes together form “Luke’s Gospel.”
      1. The literary implication of the two-volume work is that Acts represents not only an extension but also an interpretation of the first volume.
      2. The theological implication is that the story of the church continues the story of Jesus. Luke links them by a variety of means, but most importantly by having the same Holy Spirit at work in Jesus also at work in his followers.

II. Luke uses geography as a way of focusing attention on the critical part of his narrative.
   B. The narrative in Acts moves out from Jerusalem (1:8) but constantly circles back to the city.
   C. Luke thereby makes the reader focus on events in Jerusalem that form the middle of the story (Luke 19–Acts 8): Here, Jesus is rejected, raised, exalted, and here, his disciples are empowered to preach and heal in his name.

III. An even more important literary device spanning both volumes is Luke’s use of prophecy.
   A. As in the other Gospels, Luke notes the way that the events in his story stand in “fulfillment” of prophecies written in Torah, although he avoids Matthew’s formula citations and extends such fulfillment to the events of Acts, as well.
   B. More distinctive is the way in which characters in the narrative make statements that are prophetic and that are “fulfilled” by the subsequent events in the narrative.
1. Sometimes, this is a matter of a “self-fulfilling prophecy” within a single incident (Jesus in Nazareth, Stephen’s martyrdom).
2. Sometimes, it is a matter of “programmatic prophecy,” in which a statement governs the direction of the subsequent narrative.

C. Luke also portrays his major characters as prophets in the tradition of Moses.
   1. In the Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as a prophet who brings God’s visitation to the people.
   2. In Acts, all the protagonists are depicted in prophetic terms.

D. Each of the Synoptic Gospels engages a distinct aspect of the symbolic world of Torah: Mark uses apocalyptic; Matthew, rabbinic; and Luke, prophetic dimensions of contemporary Judaism.

IV. Luke is distinctive by prefacing each of his volumes with a prologue.
   A. The prologue to Acts is a simple connective to the first part of the story.
      1. He is writing a certain sort of history, about the fulfillment of God’s promises.
      2. He writes his story in sequence to provide assurance to his Gentile readers.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does the decision to read all of Luke-Acts as the “Gospel According to Luke” affect the way the two volumes are interpreted?
2. Why does “prophecy” best describe Luke’s distinctive way of engaging the symbolic world of Torah—in contrast to Mark and Matthew?
Lecture Eighteen

Gospel of Luke—God’s Prophet

Scope: In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is presented as a prophet. He delivers a radical message of reversal of human norms in the name of God’s visitation. He calls for people to repent and form a restored Israel around him. Luke shows Jesus embodying that message by a ministry of healing, both physical and spiritual. The prophet Jesus lives a radical life, characterized by itinerancy, poverty, prayer, and a servant model of leadership. He calls his followers to continue that prophetic ministry and bears witness to God’s kingdom in the face of public opposition.

Outline

I. The infancy account in Luke’s Gospel prepares readers to perceive Jesus as a prophet and king.
   A. Luke’s infancy account (chs. 1–2) has a completely different character than Matthew’s.
      2. Mary, rather than Joseph, is the main character and is given the task of interpreting events.
      3. Rather than use formula citations, Luke writes in a manner that imitates scripture.
   B. Jesus is raised among prophets; his mother, cousin, uncle and aunt, and even strangers who encounter him all utter prophetic speech concerning God’s work for Israel through John and Jesus.
   C. Readers know from the beginning that the Holy Spirit is at work in Jesus (1:35, 41, 67; 2:26–27).
   D. Luke’s distinctive account of the finding of Jesus in the temple (2:41–52) reveals Jesus’s commitment to his Father’s business.
   E. Luke’s Gospel has a more biographical feel to it.

II. After his baptism and temptation, Jesus announces his prophetic vision of a restored people.
   A. The most striking feature of Luke’s account of Jesus’s baptism is the way in which he reveals his historical consciousness. Luke connects his story of Jesus to larger world history.
   B. John is a genuine prophetic predecessor, “proclaiming the good news” and demanding the fruits of repentance (3:1–18). Luke has John teach people about the use of possessions. This is one of Luke’s major themes. For Luke, the response to God is measured by the way in which one uses one’s possessions.
   C. Jesus’s baptism is shaped to show him as directly and bodily receiving the Holy Spirit while in prayer (3:21–22), and the genealogy (which goes back to Adam and God) repeats the point that Jesus is the “Son of God” (3:23–38).
   D. Luke emphasizes the guiding role of the Holy Spirit through the temptation and his first teaching in Galilee (4:1, 14).
   E. Luke uses Jesus’s preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth (4:16–30) to identify him as a prophetic messiah whose mission is to restore the outcast to the people, announcing a “favorable year to the Lord.”
      1. Luke’s account of Jesus’s first sermon in his hometown of Nazareth is one of the most dramatic scenes in Luke’s Gospel.
      2. In Mark’s and Matthew’s Gospels, the parallel account is bare.
      3. In his first sermon, Jesus announces a concept that Luke has already abundantly developed—that he is anointed with the Holy Spirit and, therefore, is the Messiah.
      4. Luke uses the event of Jesus’s first sermon to show that Jesus is fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah—that he is the Messiah come to proclaim good news to the poor.
      5. But, in Luke, Jesus also suffers the proverbial fate of a prophet in his own land—he taunts his audience by announcing that the good news is not just for the Jews but for Gentiles, as well. On hearing this, his audience becomes enraged and rejects him.
      7. The summary of Jesus’s ministry in 7:22 reaffirms the nature of the prophet’s work. The “good news” means the sick are healed, the dead are raised, and the poor have had the good news preached to them.
III. Luke portrays Jesus’s ministry as a prophetic call to inclusion in God’s people.
   A. Luke’s language about possessions has two aspects:
      1. At one level, it symbolizes the marginalized of society who are called into God’s favor.
      2. At another level, the response to that call must be enacted by the use of possessions; that is, possessions are shared with others.
   B. Physical and spiritual “healing” is at the same time a “salvation” that is social in character. Thus, in Luke, Jesus’s ministry is more political than it is in Mark and Matthew; it is remarkable for the way in which Jesus reaches out to the stigmatized of society.
   C. Luke uses table-fellowship as a way of symbolizing Jesus’s program of healing the people. For eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus is rebuked by the Pharisees (7:34).
   D. In Luke’s narrative, sinners, the outcast, and the poor are the new righteous, while the righteous and the powerful are being excluded. The Pharisees stand as the model of those who are being excluded from the people.
   E. Luke’s distinctive parables serve to interpret this prophetic ministry of healing and restoration (see the Samaritan [10:29–37] and the Prodigal Son [15:11–32]).

IV. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is himself a charismatic figure whose radical manner of life exemplifies his program.
   A. Jesus is led by the Spirit and obedient to God, as shown by his constant prayer.
   B. Jesus is poor and a wanderer who depends on the hospitality of others.
   C. Jesus exercises a form of leadership based on the service of others.

V. The Lukan Jesus calls followers to a radical discipleship that imitates the prophetic life of Jesus (see 14:26–33).

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
2. Discuss the way in which healing is a “sign of salvation” in Luke’s Gospel.
Lecture Nineteen
Gospel of Luke—The Prophet and the People

Scope: The prophet visits God’s people in order to gather them into a restored people. The prophet’s call demands conversion, a real change of life. Those who respond to the prophet’s radical demands with faith find a place at his table. Those who reject his demands find themselves displaced from their place in the people. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’s last journey to Jerusalem is an extended one, in which he forms a people around himself and instructs them. Luke’s passion account, in turn, is distinctive both for its portrayal of Jesus and for the way in which blame for Jesus’s death is shifted toward Jewish leaders and away from the ordinary Jewish people.

Outline

I. The suggestion that Luke-Acts is best understood as a Hellenistic biography has merit but omits the two most important characters.
      1. The portrayal of Jesus as prophet overlaps the stereotype of the Cynic philosopher.
      2. The apostles in Acts are shaded to resemble philosophers in their courage before tyrants.
   B. But Luke-Acts is better understood as history because it opens up the story of Jesus and his followers to a much larger stage.
      1. In Mark, there is an almost claustrophobic focus on Jesus and the disciples.
      2. In Matthew, the story is opened up to conflict with formative Judaism.
      3. Luke connects the story to larger world history and, above all, to the biblical story.
   C. Luke's main characters are the God of Israel (whose son Jesus is) and the people of Israel (whom the prophet Jesus calls to repentance), and the main crisis is whether God has been truly faithful to the people and whether the people will prove faithful to God.

II. The prophet Jesus embodies God’s “visitation” of the people for their “salvation.”
   A. The canticles of the infancy narrative place John and Jesus in the frame of God’s intervention in history on the side of Israel (1:46–55; 1:68–80).
   B. Jesus not only announces “good news to the poor” and the outcast, but he demands, as did John, a repentance that shows itself in a change of life.
      1. The positive response to the prophet is a “faith” that means joining his radical social program.
      2. Repentance means changing patterns of life in accordance with the prophet’s program, especially in the use of material possessions.
   C. If the “poor” stand symbolically for those who respond in faith, the “rich” play the narrative role of the powerful and privileged who “have no need of comfort” and fail to repent (6:24–26; 16:14; 18:18–23).
   D. The response of Zacchaeus, the chief tax-gatherer, expresses the theme of salvation and repentance crisply (19:1–10).

III. Luke portrays Jesus’s long journey to Jerusalem as a prophetic progression that forms a people.
   A. Luke inserts the bulk of his Q and L material into this constructed journey: Jesus is constantly said to be on the way to the city “with his disciples.”
      1. As he moves toward the city, he announces his death in a series of predictions.
      2. He works few wonders but mostly teaches in several settings, especially on the road and while at table.
   B. Luke carefully rotates Jesus’s speech among three groups: the crowd, the opponents, and the disciples. To each group, Jesus speaks appropriately.
      1. To the crowd, he issues warnings and calls to repent before it is too late.
      2. To enemies (the Pharisees and lawyers) he tells parables of rejection (14:15–24).
      3. To the disciples called from the crowd, he provides instruction on prayer (11:1), the use of possessions, and perseverance (12:22–34).
C. Luke shows that the small group of the journey’s start (8:1–3) turns into a “great crowd of disciples” (19:37) that greets him as he enters the city as “the king who comes in the name of the Lord.”

IV. Luke’s passion account follows the same storyline as in Matthew and Mark but with a distinct emphasis.

A. Jesus is presented in philosophical/prophet terms as a figure who is in control of his feelings, exercises authority to the end, and dies with a prayer of acceptance on his lips. In contrast to Mark and Matthew, where Jesus is recognized by his executioner as the “son of God,” in Luke, Jesus is recognized by his executioner as “a righteous man.”(23:47).

B. The ordinary people of the city—who thronged to Jesus as a teacher (21:38)—play little role in the plot against him. In contrast to Matthew, who puts the blame on the whole populace, in Luke’s Gospel, it is the leadership that works against Jesus. At his death, the populace repents (23:48–49).

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:


Questions to Consider:
1. Discuss the way in which Luke has a more “political” understanding of the “kingdom of God.”
2. What is the effect of Luke’s distinctive portrayal of Jesus and the people of Israel in his passion narrative?
Lecture Twenty
Acts of the Apostles—The Prophet’s Movement

Scope: In the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus’s followers prove themselves to be prophetic successors. Like Moses and like Jesus, they are filled with the Holy Spirit, speak God’s word boldly, and work signs and wonders. They exemplify the radical lifestyle in the community of possessions. They witness boldly before courts and kings. And they extend Jesus’s understanding of God’s people by an even more radical inclusion than that of Jesus himself, when the Gentiles are accepted into the people without circumcision and the obligation to observe the Law.

Outline

   A. At the surface level, it is a straightforward account of the events of Christianity’s first great expansion from Jerusalem to Rome.
      1. Jesus’s programmatic prophecy in Acts 1:8 provides a table of contents: Jerusalem (1–8); Judaea and Samaria (8–12); to the ends of the world, that is, Rome (13–28).
      2. It is a selective account, with particular attention given to Peter and Paul and the transmission of the good news from Jews to Gentiles.
   B. At a deeper level, Acts portrays the church as the continuation of the prophetic movement started by Jesus.
      1. The bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the disciples means that they are empowered as Jesus was.
      2. All the protagonists are described in stereotypical prophetic terms as they proclaim the “good news” about what God had done in Jesus.
      3. Thus, Luke’s portrayal of the disciples is not as negative as it is in Mark.

II. The first church in Jerusalem is portrayed as the restoration of Israel for which Jesus worked.
   A. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh is interpreted as the sign of the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus (2:1–37).
   B. Those who “save themselves from this evil generation” fulfill the prophetic program.
      1. They share their possessions fully so that no one was in need (2:41–47; 4:32–37).
      2. The apostles continue to heal as a “sign of salvation” of the people (3:1–26).
   C. The thousands of Jews who join the community demonstrate Luke’s two major concerns.
      1. Even though his people—or, mainly, their leaders—rejected God’s first “visitation,” he remained faithful and provided another chance for repentance through the preaching of the apostles.
      2. Even though they had rejected Jesus, many of the Jews accepted “the prophet whom God raised up,” with the result that they became the authentic remnant of Israel.
      3. The theological point that Luke is making here is that the mission to the Gentiles, especially as carried on by Paul, is not a replacement of Israel but a continuation.

III. The apostles are portrayed as prophets who continue Jesus’s radical manner of life in new circumstances.
   A. They share their possessions and manifest “servant leadership” by their “waiting at tables” (4:32–37; 6:1–7).
   B. They pray at every moment of crisis, just as Jesus had done, and are empowered by the Holy Spirit, as he was (4:23–31).
   C. They heal the outcast of the people, breaking the boundaries of separation and stigma caused by illness (5:12–16; 6:4–8; 8:32–43).
IV. The church continues the radical prophetic program of table-fellowship for the outcast through the bold initiative of including Gentiles without requiring circumcision and the observance of Torah.

A. As part of their doctrine of separateness, Jews did not eat with Gentiles. Thus, the church was radical in its program of table-fellowship that included Gentiles.


C. Luke suggests that the church was even more radical in its vision than Jesus was: Accepting Gentiles without circumcision and Law meant accepting God’s new work more than the precedent of scripture.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Comment on this proposition: “Luke’s account of the Jerusalem church shows that God has proven faithful to Israel.”
2. Why can the acceptance of Gentile believers without requiring circumcision and the observance of the Law be regarded as a radical realization of the prophetic vision of Luke’s Jesus?
Lecture Twenty-One

Gospel of John—Context of Conflict

Scope: The full force of the synoptic interdependence is first realized when we appreciate how very different the Fourth Gospel (John) is in its version of Jesus’s ministry, his speech, his acts, even his passion, death, and resurrection. Asking about the relationship between the Synoptics and John leads to the consideration of John’s style, structure, and symbolism. What appears to be a simple and straightforward account of an eyewitness turns out to be something more complex and more interesting.

Outline

I. Although it is also a narrative Gospel, John (also FG = Fourth Gospel) stands apart from the Synoptic Gospels as a distinctive witness and interpretation.
   A. The basic facts of Jesus’s ministry are different.
      1. His ministry is three years rather than one year and is focused in Judaea rather than Galilee.
      2. The cleansing of the temple is in a different place in the narrative; the time of Jesus’s death is different, as is the character of the resurrection accounts.
   B. In the Fourth Gospel, the nature of Jesus’s deeds is distinctive.
      1. In Mark, exorcisms signal the arrival of God’s rule; John has no exorcisms.
      2. John has Jesus work seven “signs” of a highly symbolic character.
   C. In John, Jesus speaks in a manner different than in Matthew, Luke, and Mark.
      1. Jesus does not issue crisp aphorisms, tell parables, or have controversies that are settled by an authoritative saying.
      2. In John, Jesus has controversies involving his identity that go on for a long time (see chs. 5–10), and he speaks in long, self-revelatory monologues.
   D. In John, there is a different sense of eschatology: In the Synoptics, God’s judgment is future; in John, the emphasis is on the present judgment effected through Jesus.

II. The question of the relationship of John and the Synoptics is not easily resolved.
   A. There is no sign of literary dependence on the Synoptics, but there is a sharing in the traditions also used by the Synoptics.
      1. John and the Synoptics have recognizably the same passion narrative, and a number of stories (in a new form) are found in both John and the Synoptics (see especially the multiplication of the loaves; the cleansing of the temple).
      2. John and the Synoptics share the same range of titles for Jesus: king, prophet, Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man.
   B. The Fourth Gospel can be seen as supplemental to the Synoptic tradition.
      1. The traditional understanding of this is material: John’s three-year account provides information not in the Synoptics’ one-year narrative.
      2. The relationship is rather functional: John makes explicit what is implicit in the Synoptic tradition.

III. The circumstances of John’s composition are obscure, but the text reveals signs of conflict and developed reflection.
   A. Some of John’s language reflects a situation not during Jesus’s lifetime but in the experience of the community (see chs. 3, 9, and 16).
   B. The Gospel is remarkably candid about the deeper insight and interpretation that came about as a result of the resurrection and the presence of the paraclete (16:12–14; see 2:21–22; 12:16; 20:9).
   C. Although it has roots in eyewitness testimony (19:35), therefore, the Gospel as it stands is the result of sustained reflection on the past in light of continuing experiences in the community.
   D. Those experiences account at least in part for the sharp dualism found in the Fourth Gospel (and other literature associated with John): light and darkness, flesh and spirit, truth and falsehood are symbols that stand for a theological opposition (God/world) and social conflict (insider/outsider).
IV. The Fourth Gospel is at once straightforward and subtle, profound and provocative.
   A. It is stylistically simple and structurally straightforward.
      1. The prologue (1:1–18) announces themes and sets the pattern.
   B. Yet everything in John contains at least two levels of meaning.
      1. John is fond of words bearing double meanings: see “lifted up” (3:14) and “glory.”
      2. John appropriates the symbolism of Jewish feasts to express the identity of Jesus: Passover (2:13; 6:4; 12:12), Booths (7:1–10), and Hanukkah (10:22).
      3. Characters in the story have a representative function: Martha, Nicodemus, Jesus, the Jews.

Essential Reading:
The Gospel of John.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Consider this proposition: “The character of the Synoptic tradition becomes clear only when it is compared to the Gospel of John.”
2. How does the setting of separation from Judaism help account for the sharp dualism of John’s Gospel?
Lecture Twenty-Two
Gospel of John—Jesus as the Man From Heaven

Scope: John’s prologue (1:1–18) establishes the basic dramatic scenario of this most dramatic Gospel: Jesus is not simply a Jewish teacher but the word of God who has entered fully into human flesh. His wonders are “signs” of God’s presence. He is the light that enters a world of darkness and, by revealing light, also brings judgment on those who prefer darkness to light. This presentation considers John’s powerful portrait of Jesus, which combines a constant insistence on his full humanity, while also portraying him as the revelation of God.

Outline

I. In place of a genealogy or birth account, John’s prologue (1:1–18) serves to identify Jesus as the one who has come from God to dwell with humans and to establish basic themes of the Gospel.
   A. Jesus is the word who exists from the beginning with God (1:1–2) and who “became flesh” (1:14) in order to reveal God’s glory (= presence) in humanity.
   B. The prologue contrasts light and darkness, God and world, those who accept and those who reject, law and grace/truth; it also provides the Gospel’s pattern of descent and ascent (see 1:18).
   C. The prologue contains two interruptions about John the Baptist, who is identified as a witness to the light.
   D. The Gospel of John names Jesus as God.

II. The narrative sequence following the prologue shows the subtlety of John’s literary art.
   A. In content, 1:19–51 serves as the equivalent of the Synoptics’ “Calling of the Disciples.” But in John, the process is one of mutual naming, in which Jesus’s identity is unfolded for the reader.
   B. The story of the Wedding at Cana is dramatic in its own right, but when read within the sequence of “days” noted in 1:1, 29, 35, 43, and 2:1, the reader understands that “the first of Jesus’ signs” (2:11) also reveals the first seven days of the new creation.

III. The Book of Signs (1:19–12:50) is dominated by the public wonders worked by Jesus and the controversies with his opponents that they generate.
   A. John has Jesus work seven “signs”: changing water into wine (2:1–11), healing an official’s son (4:36–53), healing a paralytic (5:2–9), feeding the multitude (6:1–13), walking on water (6:16–21), healing a man born blind (9:1–12), and raising Lazarus from the dead (11:17–44).
   B. Throughout his public ministry, Jesus is identified by outsiders and believers with a variety of titles.
      1. His enemies claim he has a demon and is a Samaritan (7:20; 8:48).
      2. The crowd names Jesus as “Messiah” and “Prophet” and “King”; in John, each of these designations has some level of truth, and each reveals something of contemporary messianic expectations.
      3. Believers call Jesus Messiah and Son of God, Savior of the world, Holy One of God, and even “God.”
   C. Distinctive to John is the consistent way in which Jesus also names himself.
      1. As in the Synoptics, Jesus uses the title “Son of Man” of himself but in a distinctive manner.
      2. In the Synoptics, this title is connected with Jesus’s future glory and present suffering.
      3. In John, this title is connected with the notion of Jesus as “the man from heaven.”
      4. Jesus also designates himself by a series of “I am” statements connected to metaphors (corresponding to his signs): bread of life (6:35), light of the world (8:12), door of the sheep (10:7), good shepherd (10:11), true vine (15:1), resurrection and life (11:25), the way and the truth and the life (14:6).
      5. Most dramatic are the absolute “I am” statements that echo the self-identification of God in Torah (8:58; 18:6; see Exod. 3:14; Isa. 41:4).

IV. The Book of Signs concludes with a dramatic recap of Jesus’s ministry in which the crisis is posed in terms of a choice (and a judgment) between light and darkness, between the approval of humans and the presence of God (12:27–50).

Essential Reading:
The Gospel of John, 1–6.

**Supplementary Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. How does John reinforce the “insider” character of his narrative by the way in which characters “name” Jesus?
2. How does John communicate that God’s judgment is present in the ministry of Jesus?
Lecture Twenty-Three
Gospel of John—Jesus as Obedient Son

Scope: If in John’s drama Jesus represents God, then Jesus’s opponents (whom John tends to call simply the Jews) represent enemies of God. Consequently, John’s Gospel has sometimes been considered the most anti-Semitic New Testament composition. The complex ways in which this Gospel engages the world of Judaism are considered in this presentation. How should we evaluate the way in which, even as this Gospel asserts that “salvation comes from the Jews,” it portrays actual Jews as blind to the light and resistant to God’s claims?

Outline

I. The powerful poetry of the Fourth Gospel has had a powerful effect, both positive and negative, on readers.
   A. For Christian theologians, John is the great source of doctrine concerning Jesus, precisely because of the explicitness of its propositions: “God so loved the world as to send his only son” (3:16).
   B. For mystics and ordinary believers alike, John’s Jesus is the deep heart of the Christian reality: They think of the Gospel as having a Synoptic plot but a Johannine character.
   C. The negative effect is more subtle, and that is the tendency, when John’s Gospel is made the center of Christian consciousness, to cultivate a sectarian attitude hostile to outsiders.
   D. Above all, John’s Gospel is one of the main sources for the strain of anti-Semitism running through Christian theology.

II. The other side of the coin is that John’s Jesus is, in many respects, the most intensely human in all the Gospels.
   A. It is a natural tendency to focus only on the “divine” dimensions of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. Because Jesus “represents” God in the drama, his actions and speech seem to hover over the surface.
   B. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus’s humanity is displayed in two significant ways:
      1. Jesus experiences fatigue (4:6) and anguish (12:27; 13:21); he weeps at the death of a friend (11:33–35); changes his mind (7:1–10); converses with real people in real places—they answer back!—(see 4:7–26); shows suspicion (2:24–25) and irritation (2:4; 6:26); and has real friends (11:1–12:9).
      2. Jesus is also, as human obedient to God, doing and saying what he is commanded by the Father: “I do not seek my own will, but the will of the one who sent me” (5:19–30).

III. John’s relationship with Judaism, similarly, is extraordinarily complex, having positive and negative features.
   A. John’s Gospel is not a late, Hellenistically shaped, “Platonic” Gospel, as some critics of the 19th century supposed, but in many ways, just as “Jewish” as Matthew’s Gospel.
      1. Archaeology has tended to confirm the Gospel’s accuracy concerning Palestine, and it is a reliable source for relations with Samaritans and Jewish messianic expectations.
      2. The religious and ethical dualism that earlier scholars considered Greek is found in much the same form in the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran, another sectarian Jewish group hostile to outsiders.
   B. In fact, there are elements in John that can be read positively with regard to the Jewish tradition.
      1. In conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus declares that “salvation is from the Jews” (4:22).
      2. In the prologue, 1:17 identifies the Law as a “grace” that is fulfilled by the “grace and truth” revealed by the Son.
      3. John insists that the proper understanding of scripture is as a witness to Jesus (5:38–40).
      4. John uses the symbolism of the traditional Jewish feasts to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the ways that God’s presence was mediated to the people: He is Hanukkah (temple), Passover (bread and lamb), Booths (water and light).
   C. But the overwhelming impression given by John’s language is negative toward the Jews as a people.
      1. The Gospel may well have arisen from the actual experience of expulsion from the synagogue because of confessing Jesus as Messiah (9:22).
2. But John’s drama demands minimizing any differentiation between individual Jews or even parties within Judaism (although the Pharisees still play a role); “the Jews” simply stands for opposition to Jesus (= God).

IV. Two conversations reveal the complexity of John’s portrayal of Jesus within Judaism.
   A. In conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and “ruler of the Jews,” Jesus reveals the distance between himself and those who are not “born from above” (3:1–15; see 19:39).
   B. After the healing of the man born blind, the conversation reveals who really sees and who is really blind (9:1–41).

Essential Reading
The Gospel of John, 3, 4, 9.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Discuss the distinct ways in which the Gospels of Matthew and John negotiate their respective contexts of conflict with formative Judaism.
2. In what ways does John seek to communicate the full humanity of Jesus?
Lecture Twenty-Four

Gospel of John—Witness to the Truth

Scope: In John’s Gospel, the most extensive teaching of his followers takes place after the close of Jesus’s public ministry. At his last meal with “those whom he loved,” Jesus performs a symbolic act of service, then instructs his disciples on continuing his witness to the truth before a hostile world. John portrays Jesus’s death and resurrection in terms of the “hour” of his “being lifted up” and “glorified,” all themes established earlier in the narrative and here brought to full expression.

Outline

I. In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, John reserves the teaching of Jesus’s disciples to his final meal with them before his death (13–17).
   A. The beginning of chapter 13 pulls together themes that John had anticipated earlier in the narrative: Jesus has reached his “hour,” the time of his “glorification” through being “lifted up.”
   B. John has no description of a “last supper” (see chapter 6 for his discourse on the Eucharist) but describes Jesus engaging in a symbolic act of service (13:4–20)
   C. After Judas leaves the group (see the symbolism of light; 13:21–31), Jesus enters into a long discourse (including questions from his disciples).
      1. They will experience what he has experienced and must, like him, witness to the truth (15:18–27).
      2. They will be strengthened by the spirit (the paraclete), whom Jesus will send to them (14:15–31; 16:5–33).
      3. They must be united with him as a vine is with branches (15:1–8), and their moral mandate is to love one another (15:9–17).
   D. Jesus’s “farewell address” takes the form of an extended prayer to his father for his followers, that they be “sanctified in the truth” (17:1–26).

II. The passion account in the Fourth Gospel is distinctive for its emphasis on bearing witness to the truth.
   A. There are points of similarity and dissimilarity among John and the Synoptics.
      1. They share the same basic storyline: arrest, hearings before Jewish leaders, denial by Peter, trial before Pilate, crucifixion, burial.
      2. John has no agony in the garden or formal Sanhedrin hearing.
   B. John gives particular attention to the interaction between Jesus and Pilate.
      1. Jesus is the witness to the truth, and Pilate’s authority is not absolute (18:36–38; 19:11).
      2. In an intensely ironic scene, Pilate enthrones Jesus as “king of the Jews” and is rejected by the Jews (19:13–16).
   C. The death of Jesus is interpreted through Torah, as in the Synoptics, but the emphases are distinctive.
      1. The identification of Jesus as “king of the Jews” is affirmed by Pilate (19:17–22).
      2. Jesus is accompanied by faithful women, his mother, and “the Beloved Disciple” (19:23–30).
      3. The piercing of Jesus’s side points symbolically (through scriptural allusion) to the outpouring of the Spirit (see Zech. 12:10).

III. John’s resurrection stories agree with the Synoptics only in their convictions but are completely different in form.
   A. John’s empty-tomb story involves Mary of Magdala, Peter, and the Beloved Disciple (20:1–18).
   B. The appearance to the gathered disciples is John’s “Pentecost”: Jesus imparts the Holy Spirit and commissions them (20:19–22).
   D. The epilogue (21:1–25) presents a final appearance of Jesus to his followers (21:1–14) and answers lingering questions concerning the destiny of Peter and the Beloved Disciple (21:15–23).
Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does John’s farewell discourse to Jesus’s disciples help shape a distinctive image of Jesus as revealer?
2. According to the logic of John’s narrative, what truth is it that Jesus has come to bear witness to?
Timeline

B.C.E. (before the common era)

323.................................... Death of Alexander the Great
168.................................... Roman domination of the Mediterranean
168.................................... War of Maccabees against Antiochus IV Epiphanes
167.................................... Book of Daniel
63...................................... Conquest of Palestine by Pompey
30.................................... Augustus becomes Roman emperor
6........................................ Judaea annexed as province by Rome
4........................................ Birth of Jesus (probable)

C.E. (common era)

28........................................ Ministry of John the Baptist
30........................................ Crucifixion of Jesus (probable)
34/37................................. Conversion of Saul/Paul (probable)
49–64.................................. Active ministry and letters of Paul; period of oral transmission of the memory of Jesus; formation of Q?
50........................................ Activity of Apollonius of Tyana (approximate); death of Philo Judaeus
64........................................ Nero burns Rome; punishes Christians
66........................................ Start of Jewish War against Rome
68........................................ Death of Paul (and probably Peter)
70........................................ Destruction of Jerusalem Temple by Romans; probable composition of the Gospel of Mark
90........................................ Gospel of John (probable)
95........................................ First Letter of Clement
100..................................... The Didache (probable)
107..................................... Martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch
122–135............................... Final Jewish Revolt against Rome
135..................................... Destruction of Jerusalem by Romans; Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho (?)
135/136............................... Valentinus in Rome; Gospel of Truth (?)
150..................................... Infancy Gospels of Thomas and James (probable); Greek original of the Sayings Gospel of Thomas (?)
155..................................... Martyrdom of Polycarp
156–170............................... Ministry of Montanus (approximate)
160..................................... Death of Marcion of Sinope; composition of the Gospel of Peter (?)
165..................................... Martyrdom of Justin
200..................................... Death of Irenaeus of Lyons; publication of the Mishnah under Judah the Prince
215......................... Death of Clement of Alexandria
218......................... Philostratus writes *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*
225......................... Death of Tertullian
250......................... Composition of Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew (?)
254......................... Death of Origen
313......................... Edict of Milan
325......................... Council of Nicaea
367......................... Pachal Letter of Athanasius of Alexandria
397......................... Council of Carthage
500–700..................... Composition of further apocryphal Gospels
1773......................... Discovery of manuscript of Pistis Sophia
1783......................... *Gospel Parallels* published by J. J. Griesbach
1906......................... Publication of Schweitzer’s *Quest of the Historical Jesus*
1945–1946.................. Discovery of Gnostic codices at Nag Hammadi in Egypt
1947......................... Discovery of Dead Sea Scrolls at Wadi Qumran in Israel
1985......................... Formation of the Jesus Seminar
Glossary


Apocalyptic: A vision of history as tending toward a (divinely ordered) goal, often in two stages: A present age of oppression is to be followed by an age of triumph for the righteous (also: messianic age/resurrection of the just). The term is also attached to the literature containing such views.

Apocryphal: Either Jewish or Christian literature that was not included in canonical collections; not to be used for official functions but may be read for private edification or entertainment.

Apostle: From the Greek for “one sent out on a commission,” the term used in earliest Christianity for representatives of the risen Christ.

Baptism: The Christian ritual of initiation, carried out in public (probably) by means of immersion in water.

Bridal chamber: A term used in compositions from Nag Hammadi, most notably the Gospel of Philip. It appears to refer to a ritual act, but its precise meaning is uncertain.

Canon: The official collection of literature defining a religious tradition, regarded as authoritative and often as divinely inspired.

Canonical: Writings included in the collection of compositions that make up the Old and New Testaments—scripture.

Cheth: The Greek term means “anointing”; the term is used in the Gospel of Philip for one of the sacraments (confirmation?).

Christ/Christianity: The Hebrew term Messiah is translated into Greek as Christos (“anointed one”); Christianity is the religion in which Jesus the Christ is the central figure.

Circumcision: The Jewish initiation of males through removal of the foreskin of the penis, symbolizing acceptance of the obligation to observe Torah.

Cognitive dissonance: The condition in which there is a clash between an experience and a conviction (idea/symbol) or between two contradictory ideas.

Coptic: The Egyptian language written in Greek and demotic characters, used from the early Christian era; the language of the Nag Hammadi compositions.

Covenant: A binding treaty between two parties. In the biblical tradition, such treaties set out the terms of the relationship between the one God and the chosen people.

Diaspora: From the Greek, meaning “dispersion.” Any place Jews live outside of Palestine. In the 1st century, more Jews lived in the diaspora than in the land of Israel.

Didache: Short title for The Teaching [Didache] of the Twelve Apostles, an anonymous Christian writing, c. 100.

Disciple/Discipleship: This term translates the Greek mathetes, which means literally “a learner”; used for followers of Jesus in the Gospels.

Docetism: From the Greek dokein (“to appear,” “to seem”), the position that the humanity of Jesus was not real but only apparent.

Doctrine: The statement of authoritative teaching in a religious tradition, especially concerning matters of belief.

Doxa: A Greek noun that can mean “opinion” (as opposed to truth) but is used also to translate Kbd, thus, “glory.”

Ebionites: The name derives from the Hebrew word for “poor”; a group of Jewish Christians whose origins are legendarily connected to the original Jerusalem community.

Ekklesia: The Greek word for assembly or gathering that is used both by Jews and Christians in the diaspora but becomes the distinctive Christian self-designation of “church.”
**Eschatology**: Any understanding of the “end” of history; the term derives from the Greek *eschatos*, which means “last” or “end.”

**Essenes**: One of the sects of Judaism in 1st-century Palestine. Some members lived at Qumran, while others lived elsewhere. They were dedicated to a strict observance of Torah, especially in matters of purity.

**Eucharist**: From the Greek word for “thanksgiving,” the term used for the fellowship meals celebrated in the name of Jesus among early Christians.

**Formative Judaism** (also Classical Judaism, Rabbinic Judaism, Talmudic Judaism): The tradition of the Pharisees with the technical expertise of the Scribes that came to dominate Judaism after the fall of the temple in diaspora synagogues.

**Formgeschichte**: The German designation for “form criticism.”

**Gentile**: The term can be used equally for the “nations” other than Israel and for individuals who are not Jewish.

**Glossolalia**: One of the spiritual gifts in early Christianity, consisting of an ordered form of babbling; “speaking in tongues.”

**Gnosticism/Gnostic**: Terms used to designate groups from the 2nd century onward who claimed the name of Christian and understood it as a religion of enlightenment through saving knowledge.

**Gospel**: The term used for the Greek *euangelion* (“good news”), which in the beginning of Christianity, referred to the proclamation of God’s work in the death and resurrection of Jesus and later was used for a variety of literary works involving Jesus.

**Greco-Roman**: The cultural mix of the 1st-century Mediterranean world, in which Greek civilization continued to exercise influence under Roman political rule.

**Hellenism**: The cultural reality that resulted from Alexander the Great’s effort to universalize the classical Greek culture of Athens.

**Hermetic literature**: Works on revelation associated with Hermes; written in Greek and Latin in the 1st–3rd centuries C.E.

**Jewish-Christian**: A catchall term for any followers of Jesus who are not only ethnically Jewish (and practice circumcision) but who continue to have an allegiance to the observance of Torah, however understood.

**Lord’s Supper**: See Eucharist.

**Magic**: From one perspective, a term used to deprecate a religion not one’s own. From another perspective, a relationship to transcendent power that is fundamentally manipulative.

**Mantic prophecy**: A much-respected form of prophecy in Hellenism, because of the conviction that the divine spirit (*pneuma*) spoke through humans in a state called *enthusiasmos*, or *mania*.

**Merkabah mysticism**: A form of Jewish mysticism in which the heavenly “throne chariot” is the central symbol and involves the “ascent” to the divine presence. Closely aligned with apocalyptic visions. It is found in Hekaloth (“heavenly throne room”) literature.

**Midrash**: The practice of the interpretation of Torah among Jewish scholars (Scribes), in which ancient texts were contemporized. If legal texts are interpreted, it is halachic midrash; if non-legal, it is haggadic midrash.

**Mishnah**: The authoritative collection of Jewish law derived from Torah through midrash, compiled by Judah the Prince c. 200 C.E.

**Monotheism**: A belief distinctive to Judaism in antiquity—although some philosophers floundered toward it—that God was singular in existence, the one power that creates, sustains, and judges the world.

**Mysticism**: The element in a religion by which an individual seeks an unmediated experience of the divine through prayer or some other practice.

**Paraclete**: The Greek *parakletos* (“advocate”) is used by the Fourth Gospel for the Holy Spirit.
**Parousia**: Literally “arrived,” used for visits of royalty and, in the New Testament, for the “second coming” of Jesus.

**Patristic**: From the Greek for “father,” the designation for Christian literature (above all, orthodox Christian literature) from the time of the New Testament to the medieval period.

**Pharisee/Pharisaism**: One of the sects of Judaism in 1st-century Palestine, notable for its deep devotion to Torah and destined to become the main surviving rival to Christianity after the destruction of the temple. See also Formative Judaism.

**Pleroma**: From the Greek word for “fullness,” the complex inner world of the divine in some Gnostic speculation. Detachment from the pleroma is the first disaster leading to the formation of the material world.

**Polytheism**: The religious system that thinks of the divine power as distributed among many gods and goddesses, often envisaged in terms of an extended family (for example, the Olympians).

**Proselytes**: In Greek, “those who have come over,” namely, converts to Judaism from among Gentiles.

**Pseudo-Clementine literature**: A complex body of writings all associated (pseudonymously) with Clement of Rome. Composed between the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E., they may contain some earlier traditions. As a whole, they exhibit a Jewish-Christian tendency.

**Quelle**: Conventionally, the designation Q for the hypothetical shared source of Matthew and Luke comes from this German word meaning “source.”

**Sadducees**: One of the 1st-century Jewish sects in Palestine, closely associated with the temple and the high-priestly aristocracy.

**Septuagint** (also LXX): The translation of the Torah into Greek carried out in Alexandria, c. 250 B.C.E.; the name comes from the tradition that 70 translators were involved.

**Son of Man**: The self-designation of Jesus in all four canonical Gospels. The Greek *hvios tou anthropou* is a wooden translation of a Hebrew or Aramaic original.

**Sophia**: The Greek word for “wisdom,” which in some Gnostic literature is personified as an element in the Pleroma and as a consort of Christ.

**Symbolic world**: Social structures and the symbols used to express and support such structures; roughly equivalent to “culture.”

**Syncretism**: The merging of religious traditions, specifically the fusion of polytheistic systems.

**Synoptic Gospels**: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, so called because they can be seen together (synopsis) when laid out in parallel columns. The complex ways in which these narratives agree and differ demands a solution of the synoptic problem that involves literary dependence.

**Talmud**: The final authoritative collection of Rabbinic lore, found in a Palestinian and Babylonian version, each completed before the 6th century C.E.

**Tanak**: The Jewish name for scripture, an acronym constructed from the three constitutive parts: Torah (the law of Moses), Neviim (the prophets), and Ketubim (the writings).

**Theodicy**: A defense of God’s providence.

**Torah**: The central symbol of the Pharisaic tradition and Formative Judaism. In the narrowest sense, the five books of Moses; in a broader sense, all of scripture; in the broadest sense, all the lore and life derived from those texts.

**Zealots**: The Jewish sect in 1st-century Palestine that most strongly identified with the symbol of kingship and sought actively to overthrow Roman occupation.
Biographical Notes

Anna: According to the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, the mother of Mary and, therefore, the grandmother of Jesus.

Bartholomew: One of the more anonymous among the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus and, therefore, an ideal candidate to have an apocryphal work attributed to him: the Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–217): Head of the catechetical school at Alexandria, prolific author, and important source for our knowledge of early Gnostics, as well as Jewish-Christian Gospels, especially in his *Stromateis*.

Clement of Rome (c. 96): An elder of the church in Rome and author of a letter to the church at Corinth; one of our early sources of knowledge about the process of canonization.

Elizabeth: According to the Gospel of Luke, the mother of John the Baptist and kinswoman of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Heracleon: A 2nd-century Gnostic teacher and an important interpreter of the Gospel of John, quoted extensively by Origen in his *Commentary on John*.

Herod: Four members of this Idumaean family who served as kings under Roman authority enter the Gospel accounts: Herod the Great was appointed king of the Jews and ruled from 37 B.C.E. to 4 B.C.E.; he is the Herod of Matt. 2:16. Herod Antipas, his son (4 B.C.E.–39 C.E.), is Herod the Tetrarch who ruled in Galilee (Luke 3:1) and beheaded John the Baptist. Agrippa I is the Herod who kills James in Acts 12:1 and himself dies a terrible death; he is the nephew of Antipas and ruled from 37–44 C.E. Finally, his son, Agrippa II, is King Agrippa, before whom Paul appears on trial in Acts 25:13.

Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–107): The seven letters he wrote to churches while crossing Asia Minor as a prisoner on his way to being martyred at Rome are important sources for knowledge of Christianity in the early 2nd century, especially as battling Jewish Christian manifestations on one side and Docetic elements on the other.

Irenaeus of Lyons (130–200 C.E.): His five-book treatise, *Against Heresies*, is a leading source of knowledge concerning Gnosticism, especially of the Valentinian type. The entire first book is taken up with a description of the Gnostic system.

James: There are many figures with this name in the New Testament. The most significant is the “Brother of the Lord” (so called by Paul), who was head of the church in Jerusalem after Peter (see Acts 15) and who may have written the New Testament Letter of James. The Infancy Gospel of James is certainly not by him. In the 3rd century, James of Jerusalem is a hero in some portions of the pseudo-Clementine literature, which is also hostile to the apostle Paul.

Jesus of Nazareth (c.4 B.C.E.–30 C.E.): The figure on whom all the Gospel literature centers was a Jew from Nazareth in Galilee who exercised a prophetic ministry among his fellow Jews, gained a following for his teaching and wonderworking, met opposition from religious and political leaders, and was executed by Roman authority. After his death, his followers proclaimed him as Lord and spread the “good news” of his powerful presence among them.

Joachim: According to the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, the father of Mary and, therefore, the grandfather of Jesus.

John the Baptist: A figure of 1st-century Palestine sufficiently significant to be described in his ministry and death by the historian Josephus. According to the Gospel of Luke, a cousin of Jesus, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and member of a priestly family from the hill country of Galilee, who proclaimed a coming kingdom of God and a baptism of repentance from sins. The Gospels portray him as the forerunner of the Messiah, the “Elijah” prophesied by Malachi. He was beheaded by Herod the Tetrarch, possibly in 28–29 C.E.

John the Evangelist: Nothing is known about the author of the Fourth Gospel, but he is associated with the “Beloved Disciple” of that narrative, the “Elder” who is the writer of 1 and 2 John, and the “Seer” of the Book of Revelation.

Joseph: The human father of Jesus (Luke says, “as it was thought”). In the Gospel of Luke, Joseph accompanies and supports Mary, but she is the hero of that account. In Matthew, Joseph emerges as the “Son of David” to whom God’s plan is revealed and who acts to save the child. Given that the Gospels do not mention Joseph after the
account in Luke concerning the loss of the child in the temple, he may have died before Jesus began his ministry. It is only in the Infancy Gospel of James that Joseph appears as an older man with children who takes Mary as his wife/ward; in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, he appears as a befuddled and frightened stepfather.

**Justin (c. 100–165):** One of Christianity’s first and greatest apologists, an opponent of the heretic Marcion. His *Dialogue with Trypho* is our best source for Jewish-Christian conditions in the mid-2nd century, and Justin’s *Apology* shows knowledge of Gnostic teachers.

**Lazarus:** One of the few named characters in the Gospels, according to the Gospel of John, the brother of Martha and Mary, friends of Jesus. Jesus raised him from the tomb (John 11).

**Luke the Evangelist:** According to tradition, a companion of Paul and a physician. He may well have been a companion of Paul, who is a hero of Acts, but apart from the two-volume work (Luke-Acts) ascribed to him, we really know nothing more about him.

**Marcion of Sinope (d. 160):** An influential 2nd-century teacher with a sharply dualistic view: Materiality is evil, spirit is good, and Jesus delivers humans from the creator God of the Old Testament. These views resemble Gnosticism, but the exact relationship is uncertain. Marcion influenced the development of the canon by his efforts to reduce the traditional collection.

**Mark the Evangelist:** Nothing is known of the creator of the gospel genre, but according to Papias (a not very reliable 2nd-century writer), Mark drew his Gospel from the preaching of Peter in Rome. Present-day scholars see him as a writer of considerable artistry, despite his inelegant Greek.

**Martha:** With her sister Mary, she appears in both the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of John as a friend of Jesus.

**Mary, the Mother of Jesus:** In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, she appears in the infancy accounts—in Luke, she is the main figure—as Jesus’s mother. In both the Synoptics and John, she appears among the followers of Jesus. In John, she is with Jesus at the cross. In Acts, she is among those who receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, the entire focus is on Mary and her purity, and in the Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, Mary and Jesus have a relationship that tends to exclude Joseph.

**Mary Magdalen (of Magdala):** Tradition has assimilated this important witness of the resurrection to the figures of Mary (the friend of Jesus) and Luke’s sinful woman. But in both John and the Synoptics, it is her role as witness to the resurrection that is most significant. In some Gnostic writings, Mary plays a role superior to that of some male disciples (see the Gospel of Mary), and some suggest a level of physical and spiritual intimacy between Jesus and Mary (see the Gospel of Philip).

**Matthew the Evangelist:** There is a Matthew among the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus, and those who favor this Gospel as the first written see it as an eyewitness account. But like the other Gospels, Matthew shows the signs of slow development of tradition and careful redaction of earlier sources.

**Nicodemus:** One of the named characters in the Fourth Gospel, the one who “comes to Jesus by night,” (ch. 3) and brings ointment for his burial (ch. 19). A late apocryphal work is called the Gospel of Nicodemus.

**Origen of Alexandria (184–254 C.E.):** The successor to Clement in the Alexandrian catechetical school and one of the greatest theologians and interpreters of scripture in the history of Christianity, influencing all who followed. Despite sharing, with Clement, a strongly intellectual approach to the faith, he constantly repudiated the teachings of the Gnostics and adhered to the Rule of Faith handed down by tradition.

**Paul (d. c. 64 C.E.):** Born Saul of Tarsus in Cilicia, according to Acts, Paul was a Roman citizen by birth and a student of Gamaliel in Jerusalem. First a persecutor of the Christian movement, he encountered the risen Jesus (c. 34/37) and became an apostle, establishing churches throughout Asia Minor and Greece. He has 13 letters ascribed to him in the New Testament. He was martyred under Nero, c. 64.

**Peter (d. c. 64 C.E.):** According to all the Gospels, the chief spokesperson among Jesus’s chosen followers and, according to Acts, the leader of the first church in Jerusalem and the first to convert a Gentile. Among a number of other apocryphal works associated with him is the Gospel of Peter.

**Philip:** One of the 12, who appears as an especially prominent disciple of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, one of those who question Jesus at the last supper. He has an apocryphal gospel, the Gospel of Philip, ascribed to him.
Polycarp (c. 69–155): Bishop of Smyrna to whom Ignatius of Antioch wrote in his journey across Asia Minor and himself the author of a pastoral letter. He apparently knew and condemned Marcion and died as a martyr.

Pontius Pilate: The Roman prefect of Judaea from 26–36 C.E., under whom Jesus was crucified. The hearing before him is a climax in all the passion accounts but is expanded particularly in Matthew (where Pilate’s wife makes an appearance) and in John (where Jesus and Pilate have an extended exchange). He is the classic candidate for “filling the gaps” in the narrative through apocryphal works, and an entire Pilate cycle of writings is extant.

Ptolemy: Gnostic teacher of the 2nd century whose Letter to Flora is our earliest example of a serious hermeneutical theory regarding the Christian interpretation of scripture.

Tertullian (160–225): A great apologist for Christianity and opponent of heretics, especially Marcion, for whom he is our most important source, this rigorist North African eventually joined the Montanist movement.

Thomas: One of the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus who emerges as a singular character in the Fourth Gospel, whose doubt occasioned a separate resurrection appearance. A number of apocryphal works are associated with him, including the Infancy Gospel of Thomas and the Coptic Gospel of Thomas.

Valentinus: A 2nd-century Gnostic teacher who taught at Rome from 136–165 and had hopes of being elected bishop. Passed over for that position, he seceded from the church and probably ended up in Cyprus. Possibly the author of the Gospel of Truth, Valentinus had many significant disciples, including Theodotus, Ptolemy, and Haracleon. It is his mythic system that Irenaeus reports in the first book of Against Heresies.

Zechariah: According to the Gospel of Luke, a member of the priestly order of Abijah and the father of John the Baptist.
Bibliography

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
Brown, R. E. The Birth of the Messiah, enlarged ed. New York: Doubleday, 1993. This highly influential work led a generation of scholars to understand the infancy accounts in Matthew and Luke as forms of Jewish midrash.
———. The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave. 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1994. A magisterial treatment of the passion accounts of the canonical Gospels, including historical and literary analysis. The second volume contains a number of appendices, one dealing with the relationship of the Gospel of Peter to the canonical tradition.


Crossan, J. D. *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988. The prolific and provocative leader of the Jesus Seminar argues that the Gospel of Peter represents an independent witness to the resurrection and to the process by which the evangelists constructed history out of prophecy.

———. *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991. One of the most thorough, methodologically consistent, and interesting of the contemporary efforts to construct a usable Jesus; Crossan is candid about his techniques and purposes.


Dibelius, M. *From Tradition to Gospel*. Translated by R. Woolf. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934. With R. Bultmann, one of the founders of New Testament form criticism, Dibelius emphasized the social contexts within which the memory of Jesus was selected and shaped by oral tradition.


Harnack, A. *History of Dogma*, vol. 1. Translated by N. Buchanan. Theological Translation Library; London: Williams and Norgate, 1905. This is the classic statement concerning the origins of Gnosticism as the “acute Hellenization of Christianity,” based on the available texts before Nag Hammadi.


———. “The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,” Journal of Biblical Literature 91 (1972): 44–72. An essay that has shaped all subsequent study of John, arguing that the literary technique of irony used by the author of John serves to accentuate the distance between insider and outsider.

Meier, J. P. A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. 3 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1991, 1994. Perhaps the most ambitious effort at reconstructing the historical Jesus ever undertaken; still unfinished, these three volumes are marked by careful analysis and compendious scholarship.

———. Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel: A Redactional Study of 5:17–48. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976. Before Meier turned to historical Jesus research, he was a leading scholar on Matthew; this study takes on the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, showing its distinctive Matthean traits.


Patterson, S. J. The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus. Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1993. A good representative of the position that the Coptic Gospel found at Nag Hammadi contains sayings as old as those found in the canonical Gospels and, therefore, is a primary source for reconstructing the teaching of Jesus.


Perrin, N. What Is Redaction Criticism? Guides to Biblical Study; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969. A leading proponent of this method of studying the Gospels demonstrates its usefulness when applied to the section of Mark following the confession of Peter.


Schweitzer, A. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. Translated by W. Montgomery. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998. This is a reprint of the classic 1906 study that interpreted—and, in some respects, invented—the first “quest” in critical scholarship (especially German scholarship).


Tuckett, C. M. *Nag Hammadi and the Gospel Tradition*. Edited by John Riches. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986. A careful examination of the claims made for the originality of the Jesus traditions in the Nag Hammadi texts, concluding that there is a strong probability for dependence on the canonical Gospels.


Jesus and the Gospels
Part III

Professor Luke Timothy Johnson
Luke Timothy Johnson is the Robert W. Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia. Born in 1943 and from the ages of 19 to 28 a Benedictine monk, Dr. Johnson received a B.A. in philosophy from Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, an M.Div. in theology from Saint Meinrad School of Theology in Indiana, and an M.A. in religious studies from Indiana University, before earning his Ph.D. in New Testament from Yale University in 1976.

Professor Johnson taught at Yale Divinity School from 1976 to 1982 and at Indiana University from 1982 to 1992 before accepting his current position at Emory. He is the author of 20 books, including The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation (2nd edition, 1999), which is used widely as a textbook in seminaries and colleges. He has also published several hundred articles and reviews. His most recent publications are: The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters and The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship. He is working on a study of the influence of Greco-Roman religion on Christianity.

Professor Johnson has taught undergraduates, as well as master’s level and doctoral students. At Indiana University, he received the President’s Award for Distinguished Teaching, was elected a member of the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching, and won the Brown Derby and Student Choice Awards for teaching. At Emory, he has twice received the “On Eagle’s Wings Excellence in Teaching” Award. In 1997–1998, he was a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar, speaking at college campuses across the country.

Professor Johnson is married to Joy Randazzo. They share 7 children, 12 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren. Johnson also teaches the courses called The Apostle Paul, Early Christianity: The Experience of the Divine, Practical Philosophy: The Greco-Roman Moralists, and Christianity in Great World Religions for The Teaching Company.
Table of Contents
Jesus and the Gospels
Part III

Professor Biography ............................................................................................ i
Course Scope ........................................................................................................ 1
Lecture Twenty-Five  In and Out—Canonical and Apocryphal
Gospels ................................................................. 2
Lecture Twenty-Six  Young Jesus—The Infancy Gospel of James ............4
Lecture Twenty-Seven  Young Jesus—The Infancy Gospel of Thomas ......6
Lecture Twenty-Eight  Jewish Christian Narrative Gospels ...............8
Lecture Twenty-Nine  Fragments of Narrative Gospels—
Gospel of Peter ........................................................ 10
Lecture Thirty  New Revelations—Gnostic Witnesses ..................12
Lecture Thirty-One  Jesus in Word—The Coptic Gospel of Thomas .....14
Lecture Thirty-Two  Jesus in Word—Two Gnostic Gospels .............16
Lecture Thirty-Three  The Gnostic Good News—The Gospel
of Truth ...............................................................18
Lecture Thirty-Four  The Gnostic Good News—The Gospel
of Philip .............................................................20
Lecture Thirty-Five  Jesus in and Through the Gospels .................22
Lecture Thirty-Six  Learning Jesus in Past and Present ..................24
Timeline .............................................................................................................26
Glossary ............................................................................................................. 28
Biographical Notes ............................................................................................ 31
Bibliography ...................................................................................................... 34
Jesus and the Gospels

Scope:

Early Christianity was prolific in its production of Gospels—narratives that in one way or another have Jesus of Nazareth as their central character. There are many more Gospels than the four included in the New Testament. They are almost bewilderingly diverse in the way they portray Jesus.

The Gospels are fascinating literary compositions in their own right, and they raise puzzling questions about the figure they portray and about the religious movement, Christianity, that produced them. What accounts for the diversity of images? Is it possible to speak of a single Jesus when accounts about him are so various?

The most common approach to these questions is through history. The so-called “quest for the historical Jesus” asks who the human Jesus really was behind all the different portraits. One example of that quest is offered in the Teaching Company course called The Historical Jesus.

Although the historical question is legitimate and even compelling, it is also virtually impossible to answer satisfactorily. Certainly some historical statements can be made about the human Jesus that meet the strictest criteria of historical method. But such statements fall far short of providing a full or even meaningful grasp of Jesus’s identity. Worse, such historical efforts treat the actual Gospels shabbily. The literary effect of the compositions tends to be completely ignored, while the materials in them that are deemed authentic are ripped out of their literary contexts to be placed in the historian’s reconstruction.

The approach to Jesus and the Gospels taken in this course is not primarily historical but literary. Of course, history comes into play as we place the various Gospels within the development of Christianity. Our search, however, is not for the figure behind the Gospels but for the even more fascinating figure in them. Only after the full range of these literary representations has been considered can the question of “the real Jesus” adequately be posed—and it may not be answerable in strictly historical terms.

Our focus, in short, is not simply on Jesus but also on the Gospels as literary compositions. We want to know how they came to be, how they are related to one another, and how they communicate through their literary structure, plot, character development, themes, and symbolism. It is, after all, as literature that the Gospels influenced history. And it is through literature that present-day readers can continue to encounter Jesus.

The opening lectures set the context for the emergence of the Gospels as distinctive literary expressions: the historical, cultural, and experiential matrix in which Jesus traditions were selected and shaped by early Christian communities. Then, we consider the conditions that required a shift from oral tradition to written composition and the literary relations among the synoptic Gospels.

The four canonical Gospels (those found in the New Testament) of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John are next examined in considerable detail, precisely as literary expressions that witness to and interpret the Christian community’s convictions concerning Jesus. For each Gospel, we consider not only what is being said but also how it is being said. Such attention is appropriate both because of the literary richness of the canonical Gospels and because theirs are the portrayals of Jesus that have exercised the most influence through history.

We turn next to the wide range of apocryphal Gospels (those not found in the New Testament), including the intriguing infancy Gospels of James and Thomas, fragments from lost narrative Gospels deriving from Jewish Christian circles, and finally, the various compositions usually associated with Gnosticism that in one way or another can be considered Gospels.

The final lectures consider the illusive and compelling figure of Jesus, both as he is found in his diverse literary representations and as he is experienced in communities of faith that read the Gospels in the context of worship.

___________________________________

Material from Documents for the Study of the Gospels edited by David R. Cartledge and David L. Dungan, is reproduced with permission from Augsburg Fortress, Publishers (Minneapolis, MN).

Material from The Nag Hammadi Library in English, 2nd Edition by James M. Robinson, is reproduced with permission from Brill Academic Publishers.

©2004 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
Lecture Twenty-Five
In and Out—Canonical and Apocryphal Gospels

Scope: To provide a framework for the many other narratives that have Jesus as a central character, it is helpful to consider how they came to be called *apocryphal* in contrast to the four *canonical* Gospels. This presentation sketches the historical process of canonization in early Christianity, with particular attention to the crisis of Christian self-definition in the 2nd century; touches on some of the implications of the distinction between canonical and apocryphal; and provides an overview of the apocryphal Gospels.

Outline

I. Contemporary events have once more made the concept of the Christian canon controversial.
   A. Since the 4th century, most Christians—apart from some discussion during the Reformation—accepted the decision of the ancient church concerning which books made up the Old Testament and the New Testament: The four Gospels were read as “God’s Word” concerning Jesus.
   B. In the 20th century, three factors have reopened the question of the canon for many Christians:
      1. The fracturing of Christian communities and an individualistic spirit within Christianity has diminished the sense of a public institution invested with authority.
      2. The discovery of ancient texts (see Nag Hammadi) has brought to light compositions that were not included in the canon.
      3. Ideological movements both within and outside Christianity (especially feminism and the historical Jesus movement) have challenged the adequacy of the traditional canon.
   C. The popular media has encouraged the perception that “the really good stuff” in early Christianity was suppressed by some form of ecclesiastical plot (see, for example, *The DaVinci Code*).
   D. The historical reality is both more complex and simpler than this popular perception.

II. The historical process of canonization involved several discrete stages, but at no stage was there a conspiracy.
   A. The most important distinction—and one too seldom drawn—is between the stage of ratification by 4th-century bishops and councils and the organic process that started with the first writings in the Christian movement.
   B. The earliest stages are natural to the development of the movement during its first century of existence.
      1. Community traditions were used in the composition of the earliest letters and Gospels (those in the canon are the earliest in date).
      2. The critical stage of “canonizing” is the exchange of compositions among communities: It is the movement from the particular to the general, from the historical to the normative.
      3. By the end of the first century, we can detect in Christian writers the process of collecting writings that are regarded as authoritative.
   C. The stage of selection is demanded by the crisis of self-definition in Christianity’s second century, a crisis that involved both books and ideologies.
      1. On one side was the challenge of contraction: In different ways, Tatian and Marcion saw the traditional Gospels as too many.
      2. On the other side was the challenge of expansion: Some new compositions claimed revelational authority but also challenged the traditional collection (see especially Gnosticism).
      3. These challenges made it necessary for the first time to “name one’s sources” in conversations and controversies.
   D. The response of late-2nd-century teachers, such as Tertullian and Irenaeus, was to refute the teachings of the “heretics” but also to establish an “orthodox” strategy of self-definition.
      1. A set number of compositions exists that accurately if not adequately “measure” Christian existence: the canon of the Old and New Testaments.
      2. These compositions are to be read within the “measure” of the rule of faith: the creed.
3. The authoritative interpretation of these compositions and creeds is invested in a public teaching office: the bishops who are the apostolic successors.

E. The consequence is that Christianity is defined in public and institutional terms; these positions are subsequently ratified in the 4th century.

III. The terms canonical and apocryphal have specific meanings in traditional Christianity.
   A. Canonical writings are those that are exclusively to be used “in the church” as its official writings.
      1. Their most common use is in the liturgy: The compositions of the Old and New Testaments are read aloud and preached on, for the formation of a certain community identity.
      2. These are also the compositions used in public debates over doctrine and morals in the public community (see councils).
   B. Apocryphal writings are available for individual reading. Some, but by no means all, were condemned as heretical; some were extremely popular, but at the level of personal edification.
   C. The meaning of the contemporary debate resides precisely in the desire to challenge that traditional distinction, but it remains a question whether an “open canon” has any real significance.

IV. From the 2nd century on, Christianity has been prolific in the production of “scripture-like” compositions that have been categorized as apocryphal.
   A. In addition to Gospels, there are apocryphal letters and acts of various apostles and apocalypses.
   B. The apocryphal Gospels include those devoted exclusively to Jesus’s infancy, his sayings, or his revelations, as well as those that stick more closely to the narratives of his ministry found in the canonical versions.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Why is the stage of the exchange of compositions the most critical one on the way to forming a canon?
2. Comment on this proposition: “A strong sense of canon and a strong sense of church as community go hand-in-hand.”
Lecture Twenty-Six

Young Jesus—The Infancy Gospel of James

Scope: One of the earliest apocryphal Gospels is the *Protevangelium* of James. A fine example of how apocryphal Gospels seek to “fill the gaps” in the story of Jesus, this narrative focuses on Jesus’ mother, Mary, and ends with the birth of Jesus! This tale has given rise to many of the artistic conventions connected to the figures of Joseph and Mary. It is noteworthy, above all, for its obsessive preoccupation with the virginity of Mary and the association of impurity with sexuality.

Outline

I. The infancy accounts in the canonical Gospels leave many gaps for apocryphal writers to fill.
   A. Traditions about Jesus’s childhood are probably the last to form and show the least stability (in contrast to the passion narratives).
      1. Paul makes the barest reference to Jesus’s being “born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4).
      2. The Gospels of Mark and John have no infancy narratives.
      3. Apart from (quite different) genealogies and shared names, the infancy accounts of Matthew and Luke are distinct.
   B. Not only do Matthew and Luke not share the same stories (shepherds and manger and heavenly host in Luke, Magi and Herod in Matthew), but they have quite different literary structures and leave many gaps to be filled.
      1. What about Jesus’s parents and grandparents? What happened in Egypt?
      2. Above all, what happened between the years of 1 and 12 and between 12 and 30?
   C. The gaps in Jesus’s childhood are filled by a number of legend-filled accounts.
      1. The oldest infancy gospels are the Infancy Gospel of James (*Protevangelium Jacobi*), and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas.
      2. Later infancy gospels include: the Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, the Arundel Manuscript, the Arabic Infancy Gospel, the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, and a number of others.

II. The most ancient and influential infancy account is the *Protevangelium Jacobi*.
   A. The widespread popularity and influence of this composition proves that apocryphal does not mean “suppressed and unread.”
      1. The composition is extant in more than 100 Greek manuscripts, as well as virtually all ancient languages, including Ethiopian. Its absence in Latin probably is due to the hostility of Jerome and the development of Latin infancy Gospels, such as Pseudo-Matthew.
      2. The Gospel has had a real influence on attitudes toward sexuality in Christianity, on the development of doctrine concerning Mary, and on the artistic conventions of the West (see the age and the flowering rod of Joseph).
   B. The circumstances of the composition are not altogether clear, but some points can be stated.
      1. It is composed by the middle or late 2nd century (we know from citations and manuscripts).
      2. Although it has a definite sort of dualism and antipathy toward sex, the composition is certainly not Gnostic in ideology.
      3. It has an air of piety and of archaizing, but despite all its efforts, the composition shows no real contact with actual Judaism.

III. The main “gap” that this composition fills is that concerning its hero, Mary, the mother of Jesus.
   A. Anna and Joachim (Mary’s parents) are, in the scriptural tradition, childless but are given the miraculous gift of Mary (1–5).
   B. Mary is raised in a state of cultic purity in the temple in Jerusalem.
      1. In her earliest years, she is kept in a “home sanctuary” (6:1–2).
      2. She is brought to the temple at the age of three, where she is raised by the priests (7:1–3).
      3. Mary’s puberty creates a crisis: Sexuality can make the temple impure.
C. Joseph the widower is chosen from among others as a spouse/protector of the ever-virgin Mary (9:1–2).
D. The conception of Jesus creates a marital crisis (10:1–16:2).

IV. The birth and survival of Jesus are miraculous (17:1–20:4).
   A. Mary and Joseph journey to Jerusalem (17:1–3).
   B. When Jesus is born, time stands still (18:1–2).
   C. Jesus appears as light, and the midwife examines Mary to ensure that she is virgo intacts (19:1–20:4).
   D. John and Jesus escape from the plot of Herod by miraculous intervention (21:1–24:4).

Essential Reading:
The Infancy Gospel of James.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
Lecture Twenty-Seven
Young Jesus—The Infancy Gospel of Thomas

Scope: This remarkable infancy Gospel could well have given rise to the expression “holy terror,” because its depiction of Jesus as a young boy is one in which the divine power is fully unleashed through the child in wondrous—and sometimes perverse—deeds and only slowly comes under his control as he advances in age. The Gospel illustrates how, in some Christian circles, convictions concerning the divinity of Christ tended to obscure his full humanity.

Outline

I. Two other infancy Gospels adhere closely to the pattern of the Protevangelius Jacobi:
   A. A Latin infancy Gospel is extant in two medieval manuscripts (Hereford and Arundel) that may depend on a much earlier source. The resemblance to the infancy Gospel of James is shown by three passages in particular.
      1. In paragraph 69, the midwife examination demonstrates that Mary has remained a virgin even in partu.
      2. In paragraph 72, Joseph testifies that the Earth stood still and time ceased when Jesus was born.
      3. In paragraph 73, the birth of Jesus is characterized as the emanation of light.
   B. The Book about the Origin of the Blessed Mary and the Childhood of the Savior is also called Pseudo-Matthew because of its resemblance to the canonical Gospel, especially in its use of formula scriptural citations.
      1. Pseudo-Matthew incorporates some of the material of the Infancy Gospel of James—everything dealing with the earlier history of Mary—but extends the account of Jesus’s birth and infancy.
      2. The account of Jesus’s birth (par. 13) combines Luke’s birth story and Salome’s examination of Mary; paragraphs 14, 19, and 20 show the fulfillment of scripture and the divine nature of the baby Jesus.

II. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas (written before 200) is a remarkable example of “filling the gaps” in the canonical accounts.
   A. The framing of the composition (paragraphs 1 and 19) indicates the intention to supply what was “omitted” by the Gospel of Luke: This Gospel ends with a version of Luke’s story of the finding of Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:41–52).
   B. Jesus is a wonderworker from the time he was five years old (2:1–2).
   C. Part of the charm of this Gospel is the role of Joseph as the caring but harried stepfather (2:3–4).
   D. Jesus appears here as the “divine man” as child, an enfant terrible who uses his divine power destructively (3:1–14:3).
      1. He knows more than his teachers do and puts them to rout (6:1–3).
      2. His actions create terror among the Jews (8:1–2).

III. This Gospel also shows a divine child who, as he matures, slowly brings his powers under control and turns them to good deeds.
   A. He begins to perform more good deeds than bad ones (9:1–3).
   B. His education begins to prepare him for a life of service (15:1–18:2).
   C. This Gospel provides a satisfying background to the accomplishment represented by Jesus’s performance in the temple (19:1–5).
   D. It shows how compassion, care, persistence, and education shaped the unruly, divine child into a person capable of doing good for others.

Essential Reading:
The Arundel Manuscript.
Pseudo-Matthew.
The Infancy Gospel of Thomas.
Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What is the religious value inherent in the infancy Gospels?
2. Compare the way “divinity” is demonstrated in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas to the approach to the miraculous in the synoptic Gospels.
Lecture Twenty-Eight
Jewish Christian Narrative Gospels

Scope: We know of a number of narratives about Jesus only through the references made to them by early Christian writers and a handful of citations drawn from them by these same authors. Some of these have been called Jewish Christian Gospels because they are associated with such groups as the Ebionites, who considered themselves followers of Jesus but remained faithful as well to the Jewish heritage of Torah observance. This presentation reviews what is known about these Gospels and deciphers the few remains we have of them.

Outline

I. The term Jewish Christian has a number of possible meanings when used of early Christianity.
   A. In a broad sense, all the first believers were “Jewish Christian,” either ethnically (Peter, Paul, James) or ideologically—even Gentile believers saw themselves as continuing the story of Israel.
   B. But after the year 70, the larger part of the Christian movement became less obviously Jewish in character.
      1. The majority of converts were Gentile, and the decision not to require circumcision and the observance of Torah meant an increasingly “Gentile” religion.
      2. The rupture with formative Judaism after 70 meant a Christianity increasingly defined by Greco-Roman culture (see Christianity as a “philosophical school”).
      3. The canonical Gospels (written between 70–90) reflect the tension of these transitions (see Matthew’s use of Gentile).
   C. In the narrower sense, then, Jewish Christian describes those adhering to Jesus as Messiah but continuing to affirm continuity with the tradition of Torah to a greater or lesser degree (language, culture, practice).
      1. Some groups, such as the Ebionites, are coherent enough to be identified by later heresiologists.
      2. Some at least appeared to have a hostility toward the apostle Paul (see the pseudo-Clementine literature).

II. There are extant no full versions of Jewish Christian Gospels in the narrower sense. They are known to us only from titles mentioned by ancient writers and the occasional citation.
   A. According to Papias (2nd century), the Gospel of Matthew was originally written in the “Hebrew dialect” (Aramaic?), then translated into Greek; there may be some connection between this and “a gospel used by the Nazareans” (Palestinian Jewish Christians), according to Jerome.
   B. Alexandrian writers of the 3rd century refer to a Gospel according to the Hebrews, which was apparently written in Greek—it is cited in that language.
   C. Epiphanius mentions a Gospel of the Ebionites, or Gospel of the Twelve, or Gospel according to the Apostles.
   D. As far as we can tell, these Gospels are of the synoptic type and appear to represent versions of the synoptic tradition; because of their fragmentary character, it is impossible to determine the degree of difference they might have exhibited.

III. The extant fragments preserved by later writers offer only the merest glimpses into what was an extensive literary activity devoted to a Jewish Christian Jesus.
   A. In the references to the Gospel of the Nazareans provided by Origen (3rd century) and Jerome (4th century), we find mainly variations of synoptic accounts and glosses on them.
      1. Origen provides an alternative version of the call of the rich man (see Matt 15:14; Elliott 1).
      2. In his On Illustrious Men III, 3, Jerome cites a number of small alterations to passages in Matthew 12:13, 27:16, 27:51 (Elliott 8, 10, 11).
      3. In his Against Pelagius 3.2, Jerome offers an account of the work and a sample of its variations to Matthew (Elliott 13).
   B. The Gospel according to the Hebrews provides a distinctive resurrection account and some variants of sayings of Jesus.
1. The resurrection account is again from Jerome’s *On Illustrious Men* III, 2 (Elliott 4).
3. Jerome (*On Ephesians* 5.4 and *On Ezekiel* 18.7) cites two statements dealing with the ideal of brotherly charity (Elliott 3, 5).

C. The *Gospel of the Ebionites* shows a tendency to expand the Gospel of Matthew, as well as to express some distinctive theological positions.
1. Epiphanius (*Against Heresies* 30.13) provides citations showing an extensive treatment of Jesus’s call of the disciples and his baptism (Elliott 2–5).
2. Two other statements show a concern with the identity of Jesus (Elliott 6–7).

**Essential Reading:**

**Supplementary Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. What do the many fragments from Jewish Christian Gospels suggest about the development of early Christianity outside the Gentile world?
2. How would our understanding of Jesus be altered if we still had full versions of such fragmentary Gospels?
Lecture Twenty-Nine
Fragments of Narrative Gospels—Gospel of Peter

Scope: The Gospel of Peter is mentioned as an apocryphal work in ancient canonical lists, but nothing more was known of it until the discovery in the late 19th century of a single manuscript containing a portion of the Gospel. This section shows it to be a narrative Gospel of the synoptic type, with a distinctive treatment of the passion and resurrection of Jesus. The Gospel has figured in recent historical Jesus reconstructions, but great caution must be exercised in drawing extravagant conclusions from so small a portion of text.

Outline

I. There are a number of other ancient fragmentary Gospels that appear to be of the narrative type.
   A. The Gospel of the Egyptians is quoted by Clement of Alexandria (2nd–3rd century) in his Stromateis.
      1. This Gospel ascribes a role to Salome as a follower of Jesus (Elliott 4, 5, 6).
      2. The extant sayings evince a strong ascetical tendency, and the composition may have some connections to Gnosticism (Elliott 3).
   B. Clement also provides some statements from a Gospel according to Matthias, composed before the 3rd century.
      1. Three of its extant sayings resemble the individualism and asceticism associated with Gnostic texts (Elliott 1–3).

II. Still more evidence for the proliferation of materials dealing with Jesus are the references to (presumably) narrative accounts without specific attribution.
   A. Sayings of Jesus—sometimes referred to as the agrapha—appear in patristic sources as disconnected to specific Gospels. As we discover more compositions, some identifications can be made.
      1. Origen (Homilies on Jeremiah 3.3) refers to a saying of Jesus that is now attested in the Gospel of Thomas 82 (Elliott 11).
      2. Justin Martyr (Dialogue with Trypho 35.3) reports as a saying of Jesus what may be a mixed citation from Acts and Paul (Elliott 12).
   B. A number of papyri discovered in Egypt also contain fragmentary narratives (see Papyrus Egerton 2 [Elliott 1]) or discrete sayings of Jesus.
      1. Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 840 contains a dispute between Jesus and a Pharisee.
      2. Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1224 contains a small piece of a story and a saying of Jesus.

III. The most extensive narrative fragment is from the Gospel of Peter (late 2nd century).
   A. An 8th-century manuscript of this composition was discovered in Egypt in 1886–1887, and we are in possession as well of a papyrus fragment from the 3rd century; it is known to Eusebius as an apocryphal work.
   B. The historical Jesus debate of recent years placed the Gospel of Peter into the midst of controversy.
      1. One position (J. D. Crossan) holds that Peter is an independent source for the passion of Jesus and, therefore, of historiographical importance.
      2. Another position (R. E. Brown) holds that Peter is reliant on the canonical accounts and, like other apocrypha, seeks to “fill the gaps.”
      3. Given the fragmentary state of the Gospel (it starts just before the crucifixion and extends through the burial to the empty tomb and an appearance), it is impossible to make definitive judgments on the composition as a whole.
   C. The elements that Peter shares with the canonical accounts are easily identified:
      1. With Matthew, it has the washing of hands, the sealing of Jesus’ s tomb, and the bribing of the soldiers.
      2. With John, it shares the dating of the crucifixion and the breaking of Jesus’ s legs and his appearance by the sea.
      3. With Luke, it shares the thief killed with Jesus and the narrative involvement of Herod.
D. Most strikingly original is Peter’s account of the actual resurrection event, which is, at the same time, most indebted to a theological development (10.38–41).

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What does the widespread evidence for discrete sayings of Jesus suggest about the perception of him as a teacher of wisdom?
2. What would be the consequence of regarding the Gospel of Peter as a witness to the passion on a par with the canonical Gospels?
Lecture Thirty

New Revelations—Gnostic Witnesses

Scope: The religious phenomenon called Gnosticism is extraordinarily complex and controverted, but it can be said that at least some associated with Gnosticism considered themselves Christian—indeed, the best form of Christian—and produced a number of compositions that can fairly be called Gospels, though all have a distinctive character. After a general introduction to Gnosticism, this presentation discusses two of the “Gospels” that were known before the discovery of the Gnostic library at Nag Hammadi, the Gospel of Bartholomew and the *Pistis Sophia*.

Outline

I. The term *Gnosticism* covers such a complex set of religious phenomena that some scholars challenge the very concept (see Williams).
   A. *Gnosticism* is used for forms of Christianity beginning in the 2nd century (or even earlier), as well as for religious tendencies in Judaism and Greco-Roman culture.
      1. In Greco-Roman religion, the dualism represented by the Orphic tradition finds expression in the Hermetic literature, especially the *Poimandres*.
      2. In Judaism, the phenomenon of Merkabah mysticism finds Gnostic expression in the *Hekhaloth* literature.
      3. In Christianity, patristic authors describe teachers, schools, and literature that claim to be Christian but with a twist (according to their opponents).
   B. The complexity of phenomena naturally connects to a variety of explanations concerning origins.
      1. Older theories (Harnack) saw Gnosticism as the “acute Hellenization of Christianity,” emphasizing its philosophical dimensions.
      2. The strain of hostility to the God of the Old Testament led to the theory that Gnosticism arose out of a frustrated apocalypticism (Grant).
      3. The profound dualism and world-negation found in all forms of Gnosticism supported the hypothesis of a fundamental cultural shift in the early empire (Jonas).
   C. The question of whether there is a “Gnostic identity/religion” is a live one, and extreme positions should be avoided.
      1. It would be a mistake to seek to reduce all the phenomena to a single rubric.
      2. But it would be equally a mistake to so stress variety as to miss family resemblances.
      3. Certainly, in the eyes of those writers of the 2nd century later called “orthodox” (Justin, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Clement), the teachers and doctrines they described represented a clear and present danger.

II. In the case of Gnosticism, there is a more than ordinary disparity between insider and outsider sources.
   A. Before the discoveries at Nag Hammadi (1945–1946), knowledge of Gnosticism was, with the exception of a few compositions, based on the descriptions of orthodox opponents.
      1. Unlike Jewish practice, Christian polemic exhaustively identified teachers, doctrines, and practices of “heresies,” and this is how the Gnostics appear in these writings, as Christian heretics.
      2. Because the patristic writers saw themselves as a “philosophical school,” their tendency was to describe their opponents in mirror terms, thus with an emphasis on doctrine.
   B. The discovery of Coptic codices—containing some 47 writings—in the Egyptian desert (near an ancient Pachomian monastery) complicated analysis.
      1. The codices contain a wide variety of writings, translated into Coptic from Greek, including a fragment of Plato.
      2. A real diversity of outlook is present among the compositions, so that scholars today distinguish “Valentinian” and “Sethian” strains. The first is related explicitly to Christianity; the second is not.
      3. It remains a distinct possibility that the compositions represented the recreational reading of the Pachomian monks!
III. However inadequate for interpreting specific writings, it is helpful to provide some broad characterizations of Gnosticism.

A. *Gnosis* (= knowledge) refers to revealed and saving knowledge, and salvation means liberation from the material world.

B. Mythic systems (rather than historical narratives) provide a sense of origin, identity, and destiny.

C. The world of Torah is engaged mainly in a negative way, because the creator God is also the source of error and entrapment.

D. Humanity is divided into types: the hylic, the psychic, and the pneumatic, and salvation is for the few; this is an individualistic spirituality.

E. Two moral responses are associated with Gnosticism: libertinism and asceticism.

F. The role of Christ is fundamentally that of the revealer of saving knowledge.

IV. Two Gnostic compositions (not from Nag Hammadi) show the theme of “new revelation.”

A. The Coptic Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew (3rd century?) contains a series of revelations by the resurrected Jesus in response to questions (1:1–6).
   1. He provides answers on esoterica (1:30–33; 2:1–5).
   2. He provides a vision of Beliar (3:10–15).

B. The *Pistis Sophia* is a loose collection of writings in Coptic. A 4th-century manuscript was discovered in 1773.
   1. Sophia is an important figure in Gnostic myths (see *Apocryphon of John*).
   2. It takes the form of a post-resurrection conversation with Jesus (1; 2–6).
   3. Mary Magdalen is given a privileged role (96); she asks most of the questions (39 of 46).

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Discuss the value and danger of categorization: What are the consequences of using or abandoning such designations as *Christianity* and *Gnosticism* in favor of the analysis of individual texts?

2. Given the basic premises of Gnosticism (as sketched here), how likely would it be for adherents to think of Jesus in terms of “incarnation”?
Scope: Even more than the Gospel of Peter, the Coptic composition discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1947 containing an extensive set of sayings from “the Living Jesus” has generated interest and controversy, especially for the light that some think it throws on the figure of the historical Jesus. This lecture describes the composition, discusses its relations to the sayings tradition in the canonical Gospels, locates its dualistic tendencies, and identifies its distinctive portrayal of Jesus and discipleship.

Outline

I. No composition from Nag Hammadi has generated more excitement or controversy than the Coptic Gospel of Thomas (GT).

   A. Literarily, the GT is straightforward: 114 sayings of “the Living Jesus” spoken in response to questions from disciples and without an obvious organizing principle.
      1. There is no narrative structure or element beyond the bare setup of sayings.
      2. In form, it resembles the hypothetical synoptic source Q.

   B. As a possible source for reconstructing the historical Jesus, strong claims have been made for GT.
      1. Some scholars argue that it contains sayings earlier in form than in the canonical Gospels.
      2. They conclude that such sayings can form part of the database for the original form of Jesus sayings.
      3. The GT is key to the understanding of the historical Jesus as cynic/sage.

   C. Those wishing to challenge the traditional canon also place emphasis on the GT (see Pagels).
      1. It is a set of “wise sayings” that are susceptible to diverse individual interpretations compatible with diverse ideologies.
      2. It has no passion and death, so the “cross” is no “scandal.”
      3. It appears, with other Gnostic writings, to give a more positive place to women than do the canonical writings.

II. The interpretation of the GT involves two difficult critical questions.

   A. What is its relationship to the canonical Gospels?
      1. On one side, it has the version of sayings most resembling (especially when back-translated to Greek) the canonical versions.
      2. On the other side, the sayings appear in a variety of forms, and we must distinguish the age of the sayings from the age of composition (mid-2nd century?).

   B. What is its relationship to Gnosticism?
      1. Not everything in Nag Hammadi is “Gnostic,” and exoteric compositions can be interpreted esoterically.
      2. Not everything ascetical or dualistic is “Gnostic” (see infancy Gospels).

III. A comparison of the GT and the canonical Gospels reveals a wide range of possibilities.

   A. There are a number of sayings close to the synoptic versions, such as the parable of the sower (#9; compare Gospel Parallels 90) and the parables of the mustard seed (#20; compare Gospel Parallels 97).

   B. Other sayings seem to represent obvious secondary versions and conflations of the synoptics, such as the owners of the field (#21; see Gospel Parallels 225, 95) and the two masters/wineskins (#47; Gospel Parallels 174, 54).

   C. Some sayings resemble those in the synoptics but are put to quite different use, such as GT 72. (Compare Luke 12:13; it has one use in Luke 12:14–20 and another in GT.)

   D. Other sayings have a stronger similarity to John’s Gospel (#73, see John 4:34; #91, see John 7–8; #77, John 8:12).

   E. Some sayings in the GT are claimed to be earlier than the synoptic tradition, but judgments on this vary (GT 64, see Luke 14; GT 65, see Luke 21; GT 63, see Luke 12).
IV. If not properly “Gnostic,” the GT is certainly compatible with a Gnostic perspective.
   A. The “secret sayings” (#1) tend towards attitudes of asceticism (#27, 56), singleness (#23, 49, 106) and detachment (#42).
   B. More explicitly Gnostic elements are also discernible (#11, 28–29, 50, 52, 61, 87).

V. The image of Jesus and of discipleship in the GT is distinctive.
   A. Jesus is a sage, the revealer of the authentic self within.
   B. Discipleship does not mean, “follow me,” but “realize who you are.”

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Discuss the importance of distinguishing the date of specific materials and the date of composition when assessing any Gospel as a historical source.
2. Why would an esoteric composition such as the Gospel of Thomas be acceptable and even popular among “orthodox” Christians of the 2nd and 3rd centuries?
Lecture Thirty-Two

Jesus in Word—Two Gnostic Gospels

Scope: The Gnostic library at Nag Hammadi contains a number of compositions that show Jesus in dialogue with some of his followers. The question-and-answer format resembles that found in the canonical Gospel of John but is much more elaborate. Here, Jesus as the resurrected one reveals secret teachings that were not heard or understood by the founders of the great church. Of particular interest, once more because of the commotion caused in popular culture, is the portrayal of Jesus and Mary in the Gospel of Mary.

Outline

I. The dialogical form of some Gnostic Gospels is distinctive but has roots in the canonical tradition.
   A. In John’s Gospel, the last exchanges between Jesus and his followers is structured in the form of a series of questions and responses.
   B. The Gnostic Gospels transpose the setting and the significance of the dialogue:
      1. In John, it is before Jesus’s suffering and serves to prepare the 12 for what they will face in the future.
      2. In the Gnostic Gospels, it is after the resurrection, and mysteries are revealed to other disciples than the 12.
   C. The religious motivation of such compositions is not entirely clear.
      1. Do they seek to subvert orthodox teaching and authority or replace them?
      2. Do they seek a deeper and more expanded awareness beyond that available to all?
   D. Certainly the dialogical form (even in John) suggests a different role of authority: “I do not call you servants but friends.”
   E. Two compositions from Nag Hammadi reveal the complexity of this sort of Gospel tradition, not least with respect to the place of women within it.

II. The Dialogue of the Savior is at least as much “Gnostic” in its sensibilities as it is “Christian.”
   A. In the dialogue format, a prominent role is played by Judas, Matthew, Miriam, and “his disciples.”
   B. Jesus appears in this Gospel as “the revealer of saving knowledge” (120–121).
   C. In this Gospel, there is a clear expression of saving knowledge (133–134) involving the grasp of the myth (135–136, 139).
   D. The moral stance advocated by the composition is ascetical (141), with language about taking off and putting on clothing used symbolically for taking off materiality and putting on spirituality (136, 138, 143); note the reference to the “bridal chamber,” which we meet later in the Gospel of Philip, as well.
   E. The role of women is ambiguous, with both positive (139) and negative notes (138, 143) sounded.

III. The Gospel of Mary is a fragmentary witness to the special role accorded Mary Magdalen.
   A. In the canonical tradition as well, Mary of Magdala is important as a witness to the resurrection.
   B. Here, the dialogue apparently takes place after the resurrection and involves Peter, Mary, Levi, and Andrew.
   C. The male disciples are portrayed as hesitant to take on the mission they have been assigned (9).
   D. Mary rallies them with a discourse that is, alas, largely missing in the remaining fragment (10–17): She has a vision of the Lord (14) and speaks of slaying ignorance (16).
   E. Andrew challenges Mary’s leadership position (17), and Levi in turn, rebukes Peter.

IV. How “feminist” is 2nd- and 3rd-century Gnosticism?
   A. The role that women play in the compositions is clearly expanded but not more than that of other “alternative” disciples.
   B. Insofar as women participate in the process of saving revelation, their status is certainly enhanced.
   C. But it is not certain how their position is supported mythically or organizationally.
Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Compare the role assigned to Mary Magdalene in the Gnostic Gospels to the one she plays in the canonical Gospels—especially John—are they dramatically different?
2. What would be the effect of including such compositions as the Gospel of Mary in the Christian canon?
Lecture Thirty-Three
The Gnostic Good News—The Gospel of Truth

Scope: One of the most impressive and original compositions in the Nag Hammadi library is a composition that was identified in antiquity as *The Gospel of Truth*, possibly written by Valentinus himself. Neither a narrative Gospel of the canonical sort, nor a post-resurrection dialogue between Jesus and his followers, *The Gospel of Truth* is a theological reflection on the meaning of Jesus. If, in fact, written by one of the great first-generation Gnostic teachers, it supports those who consider at least one stream of Gnosticism to be a creative form of theology.

Outline

I. *The Gospel of Truth* is one of the most impressive literary compositions in the Nag Hammadi collection.
   A. Irenaeus (late 2nd century) refers to a “Gospel of Truth”; if this is the same composition, it was possibly written by the 2nd-century Gnostic leader, Valentinus.
   B. It is neither a narrative, nor a sayings, nor a revelational Gospel but a profound reflection on the significance of Jesus.
   C. It is possible to recognize language and themes also found in the New Testament, but everything is transposed into a Gnostic framework.
   D. It has no connection with the world of Torah.

II. The Gospel places humans in a cosmic myth of loss and recovery.
   A. The opening of the Gospel states the basic theme (16–17).
   B. The fall of humans is a matter of ignorance and forgetfulness (17–18).
      1. Ignorance is connected to the creation of matter.
      2. The human condition in materiality is one of oblivion and forgetfulness.
      3. Such alienation results in envy, strife, and division (24, 29).
   C. The recovery of humans (repentance, 34) is a matter of recollection and knowledge.
      1. Saving knowledge is knowledge of the father (18).
      2. It is a matter of awakening and regaining sight (30).
      3. The result of saving knowledge is unification (34).

III. The work of Jesus is placed in this cosmic myth of loss and recovery.
   A. Jesus comes forth from the pleroma as the mind of the father (16).
   B. Jesus enlightens those who are in darkness (18) and teaches them the way of truth.
   C. Jesus reveals the truth to his followers about who they already are but have forgotten.
   D. Jesus was heard by the children but is rejected by those called wise (19–20).
   E. Jesus suffers death (18, 20).
   F. The “Book of the Living” reveals salvation (20–21).
   G. Jesus is the good shepherd (32).

IV. *The Gospel of Truth* is unusual among Gnostic Gospels for its strongly other-directed ethics (33).
   A. Self-concern means doing the will of the father.
   B. Concern for others is expressed through the sharing of saving knowledge.

V. *The Gospel of Truth* most resembles the canonical Gospel of John.
   A. The theme of light and darkness works with the pattern of loss and recovery (18).
   B. A specific role is given to the Holy Spirit (26, 30).
   C. As in John, we find the theme of mutual indwelling (42).
Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does *The Gospel of Truth* exemplify the way Valentinian Gnosticism remained in close conversation with the mainstream Christian tradition?
2. How does the understanding of salvation change when the “fall” is thought of in terms of ignorance and forgetfulness?
Lecture Thirty-Four

The Gnostic Good News—The Gospel of Philip

Scope: Another “Gospel” that bears little resemblance to the narrative versions found in the New Testament, the Gospel of Philip is another strange and, in many ways, beautiful set of reflections on the life of the Gnostic Christian. Of special interest is the peculiar understanding of sacrament found in this composition and, in particular, the difficult allusions to the “bridal chamber.”

Outline

I. The Gospel of Philip is another Nag Hammadi composition that derives from Valentinian Gnosticism.
   A. The figure of Philip is a natural candidate for sponsoring a Gospel that gives new insight into the good news (John 14:8; Pistis Sophia 42).
   B. Similar to The Gospel of Truth, this composition is neither a narrative about Jesus nor a collection of sayings but, rather, a set of true teachings concerning him and those who properly understand him, with special attention to their ritual life.
   C. The composition carries a definite and defensive air of the esoteric:
      1. The deepest truth is a secret known only to the few (12, 19), who know spiritually (67).
      2. The “apostolic men” (17) understand only materially.
   D. As in The Gospel of Truth, the teaching about Jesus is placed in the framework of a cosmic dualism: The world is the result of error (99).

II. Even among Gnostic compositions, the Gospel of Philip’s portrayal of Jesus has a distinctive character.
   A. The commitment to the immaterial is reflected in the insistence that Jesus was born of a virgin (17, 83). Philip appears to have a Docetic Christology (26).
   B. Some sayings of Jesus that are otherwise unattested are reported by Philip—again, the esoteric knowledge (18, 26, 54, 57, 72).
   C. Philip assigns a particular importance to Mary Magdalene as a companion to Jesus (32, 55).
   D. The death of Jesus may also have been an appearance (72, 116) or maybe not (50).
   E. The resurrection is interpreted in a distinctive fashion (21–25, 90).

III. A paradoxical feature of the Gospel of Philip is its explicit statements concerning the sacraments.
   A. These statements are paradoxical, because the sacraments of the larger church would seem to be a supreme example of captivity to the material body.
   B. How to interpret Philip’s language about the sacraments is, therefore, one of the most difficult issues facing readers.
      1. Does this language suggest a community that has specific ritual practices shared with the larger community?
      2. Does it point to an alternative set of practices that serve to replace those of the larger church by appropriating their names?
      3. Does it support the view that sacramental language is being used simply to point to spiritual realities (e.g., stages of growth in enlightenment) with no physical dimension involved?
   C. Philip speaks of three “sacraments” (or even more [68]) that correspond to those of the larger church: baptism (90, 101), “chrism” (confirmation/anointing? 92, 95, 75), and even the Eucharist (23, 53, 100).

IV. The most puzzling language in the Gospel of Philip is its sexual imagery, especially that regarding the “bridal chamber.”
   A. The imagery is connected somehow to the overarching mythic framework: Sexual differentiation is a sign of death (71); androgyny is the ideal and is realized in Christ (78).
   B. The Gospel’s language about Mary Magdalene and Jesus kissing on the mouth (32) may also be linked to the notion of the union between Christ and Wisdom in the mythical realm.
C. The bridal chamber occurs in other texts associated with Gnosticism. In the Acts of Thomas 124, it means a mystical union with Christ. Similar is the Gospel of Thomas 75: “Many are standing at the door, but the solitary will enter the Bridal Chamber.”

D. Language of the bridal chamber occurs in Philip (30, 73, 78–79, 127).
1. It may simply refer to a higher state of spiritual union with Christ.
2. It may represent an allusion to the Eucharist.
3. It may refer to sexual intimacy among the initiate.
4. It may mean marriage as a sacrament.
5. It may signify the condition of reconciliation with non-Gnostics (110–111).

Essential Reading:
The Gospel of Philip (Nag Hammadi Library, pp. 131–151).

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does the Gospel of Philip’s language about “apostolic men” support the view that the conflict between Gnostics and Orthodox went both ways?
2. Why would the context of controversy concerning asceticism make sexual imagery even more ambiguous than it normally is?
Lecture Thirty-Five
Jesus in and Through the Gospels

Scope: Having surveyed all the ancient texts that speak of Jesus and can, in one way or another, be called Gospels, we are in a position to ponder some of the implications of what we have seen. We can ask about the real differences between the canonical and apocryphal Gospels. We can consider the complexity of a religious movement that encompassed so many distinct impressions of Jesus. And we can wonder at the mysterious figure who, in some fashion or other, is the reason for the writing of these fascinating texts.

Outline

I. The sheer number of literary compositions devoted to the figure of Jesus in the first centuries of the common era is impressive.
   A. A survey of the literature—Gospels above all, but also letters and acts and, eventually, theological treatises—reveals both the extent of the influence of Jesus and the diversity of responses to him.
   B. Jesus was interpreted in a remarkable number of literary forms—even in the broad genre called Gospel—testifying to both the widespread literacy and the creativity of the interpreters.
   C. The fact that so many of the ancient Gospels exist—however fragmentarily—in so many ancient languages, witnesses to their impact throughout the empire and beyond. Indeed, one can estimate the relative degree of impact from the number of discrete manuscripts and translations (canonical/infancy/Gnostic).
   D. In light of this diversity, trying to address the question of the one Jesus to which they all refer is daunting. The path here is more subtle than in historical research, because not only the facts but the interpretations count.

II. It is clear, when all the literature has been surveyed, that the canonical Gospels represent a distinctive set in the category Gospel.
   A. For all their internal diversity, they share more with each other than they do with other Gospels. The process of canonization involved an ideological discernment, as well as a claim to historical priority.
   B. Leaving aside all incidental similarities and dissimilarities, the canonical Gospels share these salient characteristics:
      1. The resurrection perspective tends to be implicit rather than explicit.
      2. The commitment to narrativity implies a commitment as well to the body and to time and to human freedom.
      3. The attention to the passion and death is not incidental: Salvation is through the sharing of the human condition by God’s son.
      4. The story of Jesus and his disciples is in conversation with the longer story of Israel as found in the Old Testament, with elements of continuity as important as elements of discontinuity.
      5. What is ultimately significant about the humanity of Jesus is not specific sayings or deeds but his character of life: obedience to God and service to humans.
      6. The narrative character of the canonical Gospels makes them all the more interesting.
   C. Remarkably, with the exception that the resurrection perspective tends to be explicit in the other New Testament literature, these characteristics of the canonical Gospels correspond to the emphasis of the rest of the New Testament.
   D. Among the canonical Gospels, John is the most distinctive, yet if we tried to place it in the context of the Nag Hammadi collection, it would be as out of place as would be the Gospel of Thomas put in John’s place.
III. The apocryphal Gospels represent a much wider range of diversity, both in types of literature and in point of view.

A. We have seen compositions entitled “Gospel” that range from synoptic-type narratives that appear to be mostly glosses on Matthew, through highly legendary recitals, through collections of sayings and revelations, to theological treatises.

B. Are there elements among all these works that also might be considered common?
   1. One consistent tendency is that of “filling the gaps” of the canonical narratives. If the canonical Gospels did not exist, it would be impossible to construct an account of Jesus’s ministry from the apocryphal works; they work in the seams.
   2. The apocryphal Gospels tend to focus on one set of materials, whereas in the canonical Gospels, they appear together: thus, a focus on infancy, or sayings, or resurrection revelations.
   3. If anything, the divinity of Christ is emphasized rather than diminished. In the infancy accounts, everything is miraculous, and all the sayings and revelations are of “the Living Jesus.”

C. Among the elements of the canonical Gospels that tend to be downplayed in the apocrypha (as we have them) are the constant interaction with the Old Testament and the emphasis on the reality of Jesus’s human suffering.

IV. Finally, can we say that there are common convictions concerning Jesus that run across the entire spectrum of ancient Gospels? The “yes” is tentative and broad:

A. They all agree that Jesus is not simply another human teacher. He is more than human, and he has a unique status among teachers.

B. They agree that Jesus is somehow not about himself but about the destiny of humanity and the world: He has cosmic significance.

C. They agree that the effect of Jesus is that human possibilities have been changed for the better.

D. They concur in the conviction that Jesus represents God to humans.

Essential Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What conclusion should be drawn from the observation that the Gospel tradition tends to enhance rather than diminish the divinity of Jesus?
2. What significance should be attached to the observation that in many apocryphal Gospels, engagement with Torah tends to be negative or absent?
Lecture Thirty-Six
Learning Jesus in Past and Present

Scope: Religious and literary engagement with Jesus continued throughout the history of Christianity and into the present. This final presentation takes up some of the ways Jesus continues to excite the imagination: through the lucubrations of historians; through the reflections of theologians; through the production of literary works that continue the apocryphal tradition; through the liturgical reading, art, and music of Christians at worship.

Outline

I. The prolific production of Gospels in antiquity suggests that Jesus is a figure who refuses to stay dead.
   A. Gospels, we have seen, are written from the first out of the conviction that Jesus is “the Living One.”
      1. No ancient Gospel renders Jesus as simply a human figure along the lines of a Socrates or Caesar.
      2. In fact, the tendency is to increase rather than diminish his divine stature: The canonical Gospels are the most successful at retaining a realistic portrayal of humanity.
   B. The writing of Gospels, in turn, also serves to “keep Jesus alive.”
      1. Jesus continues to “live” as a literary character in multiple expressions, some flat, some vivid.
      2. The Gospels enable readers to encounter Jesus as a living person within the literary work.

II. The impulse to “gospel Jesus,” to fill the gaps or find a usable savior, continues in Christianity after the patristic era.
   A. The tradition of writing apocryphal Gospels continues into the medieval period.
      2. *The History of Joseph the Carpenter* and the Arabic Infancy Gospel (5th–6th century) fill even more gaps in the infancy accounts.
      3. Note how secondary characters in the canonical Gospels each have a chance to speak.
   B. Liturgical enactments represent a distinctive dimension of the apocryphal impulse even as they maintain a commitment to the fourfold Gospel of the church.
      1. The concept of liturgy as a dramatic representation of the good news developed with the establishment of Christianity as the imperial religion under Constantine in 313 because of the building of public places of worship.
      2. Pilgrimages to Jerusalem became popular at this time.
      3. The development of the liturgical year (after the 4th century) makes time itself the bearer of the Gospel story.
      4. This had the unfortunate effect of making Christ’s resurrection an event of the past to be commemorated once a year.
      5. The development of Holy Week, and, especially, of the “Sacred Triduum” gives special attention to the passion of Jesus and enables the public performance of the canonical passion accounts.
      6. Eventually, *passion plays* that are woven out of canonical and apocryphal Gospels are presented apart from liturgy.
      7. The enactment of the empty-tomb story (“Quem Quaeritis”) became a step in the direction of drama.
      8. The medieval development of the rosary as a means of meditative prayer imaginatively expanded various “mysteries” of Christ.
      9. Liturgical tropes and antiphons and, eventually, hymns continued to elaborate the Christ story.
   C. Outside the liturgy, the Gospels fed the imagination of artists and musicians.
      1. Much of medieval and Renaissance art would be a blank page were it not for the Gospel stories that supplied the material for invention in architecture, sculpture, and painting.
      2. The Motets of Palestrina, the Passions of Bach (John and Matthew), and the Messiah of Handel, however much they draw from the canonical Gospels, also represent highly imaginative renderings of the figure of Jesus that go beyond the canonical accounts.
III. The same apocryphal impulse continues in broad movements in contemporary culture.
   A. The historical Jesus movement, especially in its most recent manifestations, has been far less about scientific history than about finding a usable Jesus for people today, “filling the gap” left by the creed.
   B. More than at any time previously, theologians—especially those associated with liberation theology—look to an image of Jesus as key to a renewed Christianity, while evangelical Christianity evinces a “Jesus” piety that has strongly apocryphal overtones, and “spiritual” Christians seek in the Gnostic Gospels a Jesus closer to their ideals.
   C. Contemporary novels, plays, and movies continue to expand the repertoire of apocryphal Gospels.
      1. Contemporary novelists as diverse as Norman Mailer, Reynolds Price, James Crace, and Christopher Moore have “filled the gaps” in the canonical accounts.
      2. Godspell and Jesus Christ, Superstar are classic in their apocryphal tendencies, if not in their music.
      3. The Last Temptation of Christ and The Passion of the Christ are movies that reveal apocryphal tendencies.
   D. All such productions raise the question not only of artistic worth but also of historical and religious grounding; both their sources and their effects require examination.

IV. Meanwhile, the lively learning of Jesus continues within Christian communities that concentrate their energies on the canonical Gospels.
   A. The question of canon again arises within a highly individualistic Christianity, which has lost a sense of communal boundaries.
   B. Where liturgy and the study of scripture remain strong, the relationship between art and life, between public and private, can also remain healthy.
   C. Jesus’s portrayal in the four canonical Gospels is more compelling than the portrayals found in the apocryphal Gospels. The canonical Gospels also appeal for aesthetic reasons—as great works of literature.

Essential Reading:
J. Pelikan, Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture (New York: Perennial Library, 1987).

Questions to Consider:
1. Why does Jesus remain such a compelling figure, even for those who consider themselves non-Christian or even non-religious?
2. Compare the understandings of Jesus that are disseminated through popular culture and that are celebrated in Christian communities.
Timeline

B.C.E. (before the common era)

323.................................... Death of Alexander the Great
168.................................... Roman domination of the Mediterranean
168.................................... War of Maccabees against Antiochus IV Epiphanes
167.................................... Book of Daniel
63...................................... Conquest of Palestine by Pompey
30.................................... Augustus becomes Roman emperor
6........................................ Judaea annexed as province by Rome
4........................................ Birth of Jesus (probable)

C.E. (common era)

28........................................ Ministry of John the Baptist
30........................................ Crucifixion of Jesus (probable)
34/37................................. Conversion of Saul/Paul (probable)
49–64.................................. Active ministry and letters of Paul; period of oral transmission of the memory of Jesus; formation of Q?
50........................................ Activity of Apollonius of Tyana (approximate); death of Philo Judaeus
64...................................... Nero burns Rome; punishes Christians
66........................................ Start of Jewish War against Rome
68........................................ Death of Paul (and probably Peter)
70........................................ Destruction of Jerusalem Temple by Romans; probable composition of the Gospel of Mark
90........................................ Gospel of John (probable)
95................................. First Letter of Clement
100.................................... The Didache (probable)
107.................................... Martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch
122–135............................. Final Jewish Revolt against Rome
135.................................... Destruction of Jerusalem by Romans; Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho (?)
135/136............................. Valentinus in Rome; Gospel of Truth (?)
150.................................... Infancy Gospels of Thomas and James (probable); Greek original of the Sayings Gospel of Thomas (?)
155.................................... Martyrdom of Polycarp
156–170............................. Ministry of Montanus (approximate)
160.................................... Death of Marcion of Sinope; composition of the Gospel of Peter (?)
165.................................... Martyrdom of Justin
200.................................... Death of Irenaeus of Lyons; publication of the Mishnah under Judah the Prince
215..............................Death of Clement of Alexandria
218..............................Philostratus writes *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*
225..............................Death of Tertullian
250..............................Composition of Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew (?)
254..............................Death of Origen
313..............................Edict of Milan
325..............................Council of Nicaea
367..............................Pachal Letter of Athanasius of Alexandria
397..............................Council of Carthage
500–700........................Composition of further apocryphal Gospels
1773..............................Discovery of manuscript of Pistis Sophia
1783..............................*Gospel Parallels* published by J. J. Griesbach
1906..............................Publication of Schweitzer’s *Quest of the Historical Jesus*
1945–1946........................Discovery of Gnostic codices at Nag Hammadi in Egypt
1947..............................Discovery of Dead Sea Scrolls at Wadi Qumran in Israel
1985..............................Formation of the Jesus Seminar
Glossary


Apocalyptic: A vision of history as tending toward a (divinely ordered) goal, often in two stages: A present age of oppression is to be followed by an age of triumph for the righteous (also: messianic age/resurrection of the just). The term is also attached to the literature containing such views.

Apocryphal: Either Jewish or Christian literature that was not included in canonical collections; not to be used for official functions but may be read for private edification or entertainment.

Apostle: From the Greek for “one sent out on a commission,” the term used in earliest Christianity for representatives of the risen Christ.

Baptism: The Christian ritual of initiation, carried out in public (probably) by means of immersion in water.

Bridal chamber: A term used in compositions from Nag Hammadi, most notably the Gospel of Philip. It appears to refer to a ritual act, but its precise meaning is uncertain.

Canon: The official collection of literature defining a religious tradition, regarded as authoritative and often as divinely inspired.

Canonical: Writings included in the collection of compositions that make up the Old and New Testaments—scripture.

Chrism: The Greek term means “anointing”; the term is used in the Gospel of Philip for one of the sacraments (confirmation?).

Christ/Christianity: The Hebrew term Messiah is translated into Greek as Christos (“anointed one”); Christianity is the religion in which Jesus the Christ is the central figure.

Circumcision: The Jewish initiation of males through removal of the foreskin of the penis, symbolizing acceptance of the obligation to observe Torah.

Cognitive dissonance: The condition in which there is a clash between an experience and a conviction (idea/symbol) or between two contradictory ideas.

Coptic: The Egyptian language written in Greek and demotic characters, used from the early Christian era; the language of the Nag Hammadi compositions.

Covenant: A binding treaty between two parties. In the biblical tradition, such treaties set out the terms of the relationship between the one God and the chosen people.

Diaspora: From the Greek, meaning “dispersion.” Any place Jews live outside of Palestine. In the 1st century, more Jews lived in the diaspora than in the land of Israel.

Didache: Short title for The Teaching [Didache] of the Twelve Apostles, an anonymous Christian writing, c. 100.

Disciple/Discipleship: This term translates the Greek mathetes, which means literally “a learner”; used for followers of Jesus in the Gospels.

Docetism: From the Greek dokein (“to appear,” “to seem”), the position that the humanity of Jesus was not real but only apparent.

Doctrine: The statement of authoritative teaching in a religious tradition, especially concerning matters of belief.

Doxa: A Greek noun that can mean “opinion” (as opposed to truth) but is used also to translate Kbd, thus, “glory.”

Ebionites: The name derives from the Hebrew word for “poor”; a group of Jewish Christians whose origins are legendarily connected to the original Jerusalem community.

Ekklesia: The Greek word for assembly or gathering that is used both by Jews and Christians in the diaspora but becomes the distinctive Christian self-designation of “church.”
**Eschatology**: Any understanding of the “end” of history; the term derives from the Greek *eschatos*, which means “last” or “end.”

**Essenes**: One of the sects of Judaism in 1st-century Palestine. Some members lived at Qumran, while others lived elsewhere. They were dedicated to a strict observance of Torah, especially in matters of purity.

**Eucharist**: From the Greek word for “thanksgiving,” the term used for the fellowship meals celebrated in the name of Jesus among early Christians.

**Formative Judaism** (also Classical Judaism, Rabbinic Judaism, Talmudic Judaism): The tradition of the Pharisees with the technical expertise of the Scribes that came to dominate Judaism after the fall of the temple in diaspora synagogues.

**Formgeschichte**: The German designation for “form criticism.”

**Gentile**: The term can be used equally for the “nations” other than Israel and for individuals who are not Jewish.

**Glossolalia**: One of the spiritual gifts in early Christianity, consisting of an ordered form of babbling; “speaking in tongues.”

**Gnosticism/Gnostic**: Terms used to designate groups from the 2nd century onward who claimed the name of Christian and understood it as a religion of enlightenment through saving knowledge.

**Gospel**: The term used for the Greek euangelion (“good news”), which in the beginning of Christianity, referred to the proclamation of God’s work in the death and resurrection of Jesus and later was used for a variety of literary works involving Jesus.

**Greco-Roman**: The cultural mix of the 1st-century Mediterranean world, in which Greek civilization continued to exercise influence under Roman political rule.

**Hellenism**: The cultural reality that resulted from Alexander the Great’s effort to universalize the classical Greek culture of Athens.

**Hermetic literature**: Works on revelation associated with Hermes; written in Greek and Latin in the 1st–3rd centuries C.E.

**Jewish-Christian**: A catchall term for any followers of Jesus who are not only ethnically Jewish (and practice circumcision) but who continue to have an allegiance to the observance of Torah, however understood.

**Lord’s Supper**: See Eucharist.

**Magic**: From one perspective, a term used to deprecate a religion not one’s own. From another perspective, a relationship to transcendent power that is fundamentally manipulative.

**Mantic prophecy**: A much-respected form of prophecy in Hellenism, because of the conviction that the divine spirit (*pneuma*) spoke through humans in a state called *enthusiasmos*, or *mania*.

**Merkabah mysticism**: A form of Jewish mysticism in which the heavenly “throne chariot” is the central symbol and involves the “ascent” to the divine presence. Closely aligned with apocalyptic visions. It is found in Hekaloth (“heavenly throne room”) literature.

**Midrash**: The practice of the interpretation of Torah among Jewish scholars (Scribes), in which ancient texts were contemporized. If legal texts are interpreted, it is *halachic* midrash; if non-legal, it is *haggadic* midrash.

**Mishnah**: The authoritative collection of Jewish law derived from Torah through midrash, compiled by Judah the Prince c. 200 C.E.

**Monotheism**: A belief distinctive to Judaism in antiquity—although some philosophers floundered toward it—that God was singular in existence, the one power that creates, sustains, and judges the world.

**Mysticism**: The element in a religion by which an individual seeks an unmediated experience of the divine through prayer or some other practice.

**Paraclete**: The Greek *parakletos* (“advocate”) is used by the Fourth Gospel for the Holy Spirit.
**Parousia**: Literally “arrived,” used for visits of royalty and, in the New Testament, for the “second coming” of Jesus.

**Patristic**: From the Greek for “father,” the designation for Christian literature (above all, orthodox Christian literature) from the time of the New Testament to the medieval period.

**Pharisee/Pharisaism**: One of the sects of Judaism in 1st-century Palestine, notable for its deep devotion to Torah and destined to become the main surviving rival to Christianity after the destruction of the temple. See also Formative Judaism.

**Pleroma**: From the Greek word for “fullness,” the complex inner world of the divine in some Gnostic speculation. Detachment from the pleroma is the first disaster leading to the formation of the material world.

**Polytheism**: The religious system that thinks of the divine power as distributed among many gods and goddesses, often envisaged in terms of an extended family (for example, the Olympians).

**Proselytes**: In Greek, “those who have come over,” namely, converts to Judaism from among Gentiles.

**Pseudo-Clementine literature**: A complex body of writings all associated (pseudonymously) with Clement of Rome. Composed between the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E., they may contain some earlier traditions. As a whole, they exhibit a Jewish-Christian tendency.

**Quelle**: Conventionally, the designation Q for the hypothetical shared source of Matthew and Luke comes from this German word meaning “source.”

**Sadducees**: One of the 1st-century Jewish sects in Palestine, closely associated with the temple and the high-priestly aristocracy.

**Septuagint** (also LXX): The translation of the Torah into Greek carried out in Alexandria, c. 250 B.C.E.; the name comes from the tradition that 70 translators were involved.

**Son of Man**: The self-designation of Jesus in all four canonical Gospels. The Greek hvios tou anthropou is a wooden translation of a Hebrew or Aramaic original.

**Sophia**: The Greek word for “wisdom,” which in some Gnostic literature is personified as an element in the Pleroma and as a consort of Christ.

**Symbolic world**: Social structures and the symbols used to express and support such structures; roughly equivalent to “culture.”

**Syncretism**: The merging of religious traditions, specifically the fusion of polytheistic systems.

**Synoptic Gospels**: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, so called because they can be seen together (synopsis) when laid out in parallel columns. The complex ways in which these narratives agree and differ demands a solution of the synoptic problem that involves literary dependence.

**Talmud**: The final authoritative collection of Rabbinic lore, found in a Palestinian and Babylonian version, each completed before the 6th century C.E.

**Tanak**: The Jewish name for scripture, an acronym constructed from the three constitutive parts: Torah (the law of Moses), Nebiim (the prophets), and Ketubim (the writings).

**Theodicy**: A defense of God’s providence.

**Torah**: The central symbol of the Pharisaic tradition and Formative Judaism. In the narrowest sense, the five books of Moses; in a broader sense, all of scripture; in the broadest sense, all the lore and life derived from those texts.

**Zealots**: The Jewish sect in 1st-century Palestine that most strongly identified with the symbol of kingship and sought actively to overthrow Roman occupation.
Biographical Notes

Anna: According to the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, the mother of Mary and, therefore, the grandmother of Jesus.

**Bartholomew**: One of the more anonymous among the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus and, therefore, an ideal candidate to have an apocryphal work attributed to him: the Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew.

**Clement of Alexandria** (c. 150–217): Head of the catechetical school at Alexandria, prolific author, and important source for our knowledge of early Gnostics, as well as Jewish-Christian Gospels, especially in his *Stromateis*.

**Clement of Rome** (c. 96): An elder of the church in Rome and author of a letter to the church at Corinth; one of our early sources of knowledge about the process of canonization.

Elizabeth: According to the Gospel of Luke, the mother of John the Baptist and kinswoman of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

**Heracleon**: A 2nd-century Gnostic teacher and an important interpreter of the Gospel of John, quoted extensively by Origen in his *Commentary on John*.

**Herod**: Four members of this Idumaean family who served as kings under Roman authority enter the Gospel accounts: Herod the Great was appointed king of the Jews and ruled from 37 B.C.E. to 4 B.C.E.; he is the Herod of Matt. 2:16. Herod Antipas, his son (4 B.C.E.–39 C.E.), is Herod the Tetrarch who ruled in Galilee (Luke 3:1) and beheaded John the Baptist. Agrippa I is the Herod who kills James in Acts 12:1 and himself dies a terrible death; he is the nephew of Antipas and ruled from 37–44 C.E. Finally, his son, Agrippa II, is King Agrippa, before whom Paul appears on trial in Acts 25:13.

**Ignatius of Antioch** (c. 35–107): The seven letters he wrote to churches while crossing Asia Minor as a prisoner on his way to being martyred at Rome are important sources for knowledge of Christianity in the early 2nd century, especially as battling Jewish Christian manifestations on one side and Docetic elements on the other.

**Irenaeus of Lyons** (130–200 C.E.): His five-book treatise, *Against Heresies*, is a leading source of knowledge concerning Gnosticism, especially of the Valentinian type. The entire first book is taken up with a description of the Gnostic system.

**James**: There are many figures with this name in the New Testament. The most significant is the “Brother of the Lord” (so called by Paul), who was head of the church in Jerusalem after Peter (see Acts 15) and who may have written the New Testament Letter of James. The Infancy Gospel of James is certainly not by him. In the 3rd century, James of Jerusalem is a hero in some portions of the pseudo-Clementine literature, which is also hostile to the apostle Paul.

**Jesus of Nazareth** (c.4 B.C.E.–30 C.E.): The figure on whom all the Gospel literature centers was a Jew from Nazareth in Galilee who exercised a prophetic ministry among his fellow Jews, gained a following for his teaching and wonderworking, met opposition from religious and political leaders, and was executed by Roman authority. After his death, his followers proclaimed him as Lord and spread the “good news” of his powerful presence among them.

**Joachim**: According to the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, the father of Mary and, therefore, the grandfather of Jesus.

**John the Baptist**: A figure of 1st-century Palestine sufficiently significant to be described in his ministry and death by the historian Josephus. According to the Gospel of Luke, a cousin of Jesus, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and member of a priestly family from the hill country of Galilee, who proclaimed a coming kingdom of God and a baptism of repentance from sins. The Gospels portray him as the forerunner of the Messiah, the “Elijah” prophesied by Malachi. He was beheaded by Herod the Tetrarch, possibly in 28–29 C.E.

**John the Evangelist**: Nothing is known about the author of the Fourth Gospel, but he is associated with the “Beloved Disciple” of that narrative, the “Elder” who is the writer of 1 and 2 John, and the “Seer” of the Book of Revelation.

**Joseph**: The human father of Jesus (Luke says, “as it was thought”). In the Gospel of Luke, Joseph accompanies and supports Mary, but she is the hero of that account. In Matthew, Joseph emerges as the “Son of David” to whom God’s plan is revealed and who acts to save the child. Given that the Gospels do not mention Joseph after the
account in Luke concerning the loss of the child in the temple, he may have died before Jesus began his ministry. It is only in the Infancy Gospel of James that Joseph appears as an older man with children who takes Mary as his wife/ward; in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, he appears as a befuddled and frightened stepfather.

Justin (c. 100–165): One of Christianity’s first and greatest apologists, an opponent of the heretic Marcion. His Dialogue with Trypho is our best source for Jewish-Christian conditions in the mid-2nd century, and Justin’s Apology shows knowledge of Gnostic teachers.

Lazarus: One of the few named characters in the Gospels, according to the Gospel of John, the brother of Martha and Mary, friends of Jesus. Jesus raised him from the tomb (John 11).

Luke the Evangelist: According to tradition, a companion of Paul and a physician. He may well have been a companion of Paul, who is a hero of Acts, but apart from the two-volume work (Luke-Acts) ascribed to him, we really know nothing more about him.

Marcion of Sinope (d. 160): An influential 2nd-century teacher with a sharply dualistic view: Materiality is evil, spirit is good, and Jesus delivers humans from the creator God of the Old Testament. These views resemble Gnosticism, but the exact relationship is uncertain. Marcion influenced the development of the canon by his efforts to reduce the traditional collection.

Mark the Evangelist: Nothing is known of the creator of the gospel genre, but according to Papias (a not very reliable 2nd-century writer), Mark drew his Gospel from the preaching of Peter in Rome. Present-day scholars see him as a writer of considerable artistry, despite his inelegant Greek.

Martha: With her sister Mary, she appears in both the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of John as a friend of Jesus.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus: In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, she appears in the infancy accounts—in Luke, she is the main figure—as Jesus’s mother. In both the Synoptics and John, she appears among the followers of Jesus. In John, she is with Jesus at the cross. In Acts, she is among those who receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In the Protevangelium Jacobi, the entire focus is on Mary and her purity, and in the Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, Mary and Jesus have a relationship that tends to exclude Joseph.

Mary Magdalen (of Magdala): Tradition has assimilated this important witness of the resurrection to the figures of Mary (the friend of Jesus) and Luke’s sinful woman. But in both John and the Synoptics, it is her role as witness to the resurrection that is most significant. In some Gnostic writings, Mary plays a role superior to that of some male disciples (see the Gospel of Mary), and some suggest a level of physical and spiritual intimacy between Jesus and Mary (see the Gospel of Philip).

Matthew the Evangelist: There is a Matthew among the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus, and those who favor this Gospel as the first written see it as an eyewitness account. But like the other Gospels, Matthew shows the signs of slow development of tradition and careful redaction of earlier sources.

Nicodemus: One of the named characters in the Fourth Gospel, the one who “comes to Jesus by night,” (ch. 3) and brings ointment for his burial (ch. 19). A late apocryphal work is called the Gospel of Nicodemus.

Origen of Alexandria (184–254 C.E.): The successor to Clement in the Alexandrian catechetical school and one of the greatest theologians and interpreters of scripture in the history of Christianity, influencing all who followed. Despite sharing, with Clement, a strongly intellectual approach to the faith, he constantly repudiated the teachings of the Gnostics and adhered to the Rule of Faith handed down by tradition.

Paul (d. c. 64 C.E.): Born Saul of Tarsus in Cilicia, according to Acts, Paul was a Roman citizen by birth and a student of Gamaliel in Jerusalem. First a persecutor of the Christian movement, he encountered the risen Jesus (c. 34/37) and became an apostle, establishing churches throughout Asia Minor and Greece. He has 13 letters ascribed to him in the New Testament. He was martyred under Nero, c. 64.

Peter (d. c. 64 C.E.): According to all the Gospels, the chief spokesperson among Jesus’s chosen followers and, according to Acts, the leader of the first church in Jerusalem and the first to convert a Gentile. Among a number of other apocryphal works associated with him is the Gospel of Peter.

Philip: One of the 12, who appears as an especially prominent disciple of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, one of those who question Jesus at the last supper. He has an apocryphal gospel, the Gospel of Philip, ascribed to him.
Polycarp (c. 69–155): Bishop of Smyrna to whom Ignatius of Antioch wrote in his journey across Asia Minor and himself the author of a pastoral letter. He apparently knew and condemned Marcion and died as a martyr.

Pontius Pilate: The Roman prefect of Judaea from 26–36 C.E., under whom Jesus was crucified. The hearing before him is a climax in all the passion accounts but is expanded particularly in Matthew (where Pilate’s wife makes an appearance) and in John (where Jesus and Pilate have an extended exchange). He is the classic candidate for “filling the gaps” in the narrative through apocryphal works, and an entire Pilate cycle of writings is extant.

Ptolemy: Gnostic teacher of the 2nd century whose Letter to Flora is our earliest example of a serious hermeneutical theory regarding the Christian interpretation of scripture.

Tertullian (160–225): A great apologist for Christianity and opponent of heretics, especially Marcion, for whom he is our most important source, this rigorist North African eventually joined the Montanist movement.

Thomas: One of the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus who emerges as a singular character in the Fourth Gospel, whose doubt occasioned a separate resurrection appearance. A number of apocryphal works are associated with him, including the Infancy Gospel of Thomas and the Coptic Gospel of Thomas.

Valentinus: A 2nd-century Gnostic teacher who taught at Rome from 136–165 and had hopes of being elected bishop. Passed over for that position, he seceded from the church and probably ended up in Cyprus. Possibly the author of the Gospel of Truth, Valentinus had many significant disciples, including Theodotus, Ptolemy, and Haracleon. It is his mythic system that Irenaeus reports in the first book of Against Heresies.

Zechariah: According to the Gospel of Luke, a member of the priestly order of Abijah and the father of John the Baptist.
Bibliography

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
Brown, R. E. The Birth of the Messiah, enlarged ed. New York: Doubleday, 1993. This highly influential work led a generation of scholars to understand the infancy accounts in Matthew and Luke as forms of Jewish midrash.
———. The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave. 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1994. A magisterial treatment of the passion accounts of the canonical Gospels, including historical and literary analysis. The second volume contains a number of appendices, one dealing with the relationship of the Gospel of Peter to the canonical tradition.


Crossan, J. D. *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988. The prolific and provocative leader of the Jesus Seminar argues that the Gospel of Peter represents an independent witness to the resurrection and to the process by which the evangelists constructed history out of prophecy.

———. *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991. One of the most thorough, methodologically consistent, and interesting of the contemporary efforts to construct a usable Jesus; Crossan is candid about his techniques and purposes.


Dibelius, M. *From Tradition to Gospel*. Translated by R. Woolf. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934. With R. Bultmann, one of the founders of New Testament form criticism, Dibelius emphasized the social contexts within which the memory of Jesus was selected and shaped by oral tradition.


Harnack, A. *History of Dogma*, vol. 1. Translated by N. Buchanan. Theological Translation Library; London: Williams and Norgate, 1905. This is the classic statement concerning the origins of Gnosticism as the “acute Hellenization of Christianity,” based on the available texts before Nag Hammadi.


———. “The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,” Journal of Biblical Literature 91 (1972): 44–72. An essay that has shaped all subsequent study of John, arguing that the literary technique of irony used by the author of John serves to accentuate the distance between insider and outsider.

Meier, J. P. A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. 3 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1991, 1994. Perhaps the most ambitious effort at reconstructing the historical Jesus ever undertaken; still unfinished, these three volumes are marked by careful analysis and comprehensive scholarship.

———. Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel: A Redactional Study of 5:17–48. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976. Before Meier turned to historical Jesus research, he was a leading scholar on Matthew; this study takes on the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, showing its distinctive Matthean traits.


Patterson, S. J. The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus. Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1993. A good representative of the position that the Coptic Gospel found at Nag Hammadi contains sayings as old as those found in the canonical Gospels and, therefore, is a primary source for reconstructing the teaching of Jesus.


Perrin, N. What Is Redaction Criticism? Guides to Biblical Study; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969. A leading proponent of this method of studying the Gospels demonstrates its usefulness when applied to the section of Mark following the confession of Peter.


Schweitzer, A. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. Translated by W. Montgomery. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998. This is a reprint of the classic 1906 study that interpreted—and, in some respects, invented—the first “quest” in critical scholarship (especially German scholarship).


Tuckett, C. M. *Nag Hammadi and the Gospel Tradition*. Edited by John Riches. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986. A careful examination of the claims made for the originality of the Jesus traditions in the Nag Hammadi texts, concluding that there is a strong probability for dependence on the canonical Gospels.


